

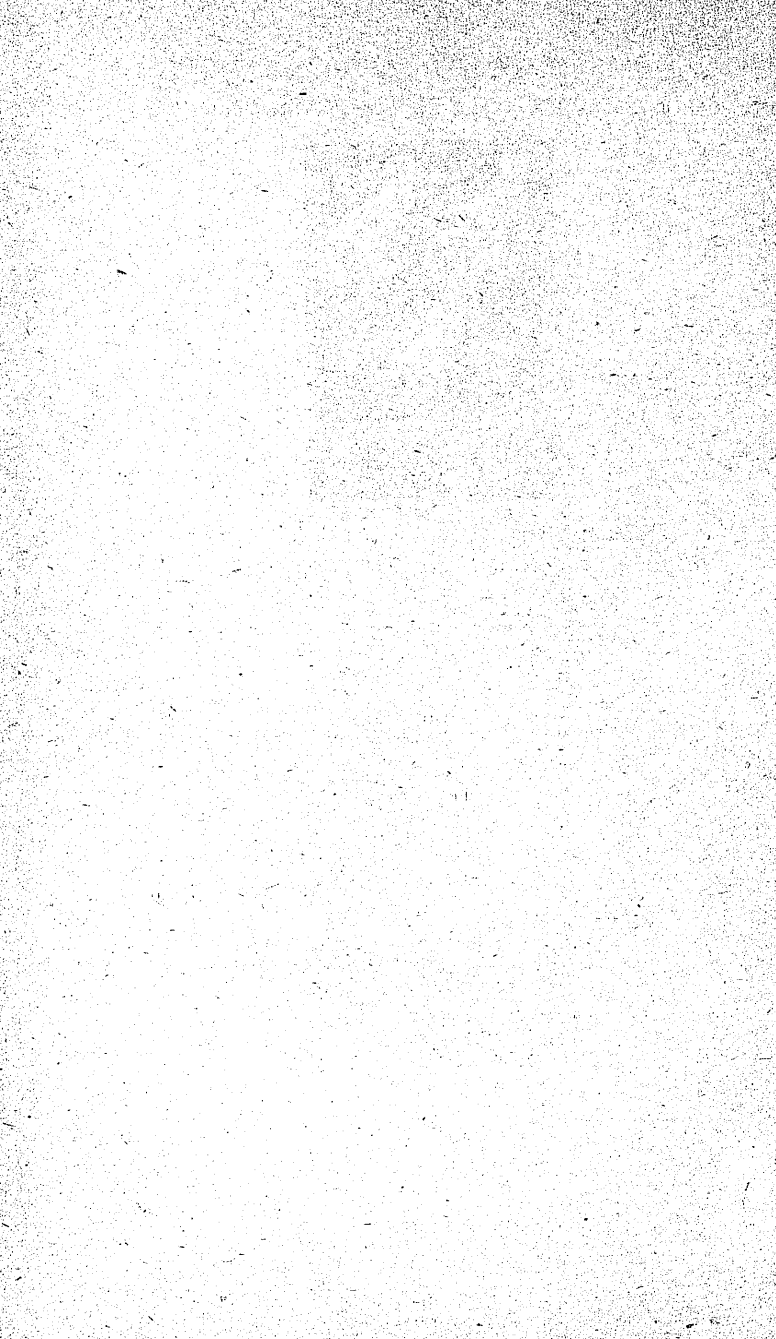
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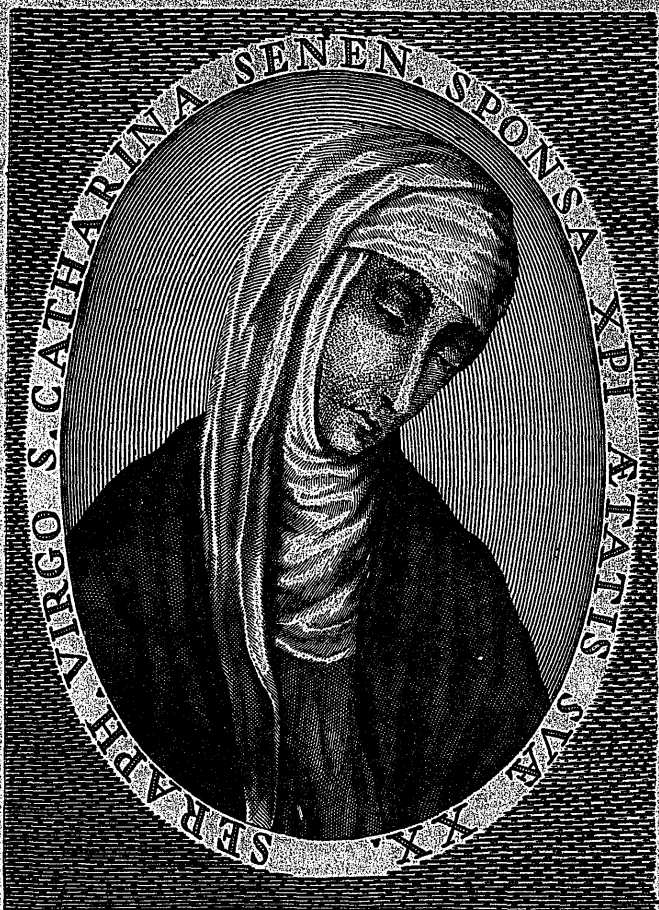
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*SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA:
HER LIFE AND TIMES*





EFFIGIES S. CATHARINÆ SENENSIS, QVAM PICTOR
IN PARIETE ECCLESIAE S. DOMINICI DE SENIS.
DVM VIRGO EXTASIM PATIEBATVR, COLORIBVS
EXPRESSIT ANN. MCCCLXVII.

*Saint Catherine of Siena at the age of twenty: from the original
engraving of Vanni's picture of the Saint.*

SAINT
CATHERINE
of SIENA

*Her Life and
Times*

By

C. M. ANTONY [pseud.]

Of the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic

Author of "In St. Dominic's Country,"

"Paradys Terrestre," etc.

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With a Preface by

Fr. THOMAS M. SCHWERTNER, O.P.



BURNS & OATES
London

B. HERDER
St. Louis, Mo.

1916

NIHIL OBSTAT:

H. S. Bowden.

IMPRIMATUR:

Edm. Can. Surmont.

Westmonasterii, Die 25 Octobris, 1915.

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PRINTED IN ENGLAND



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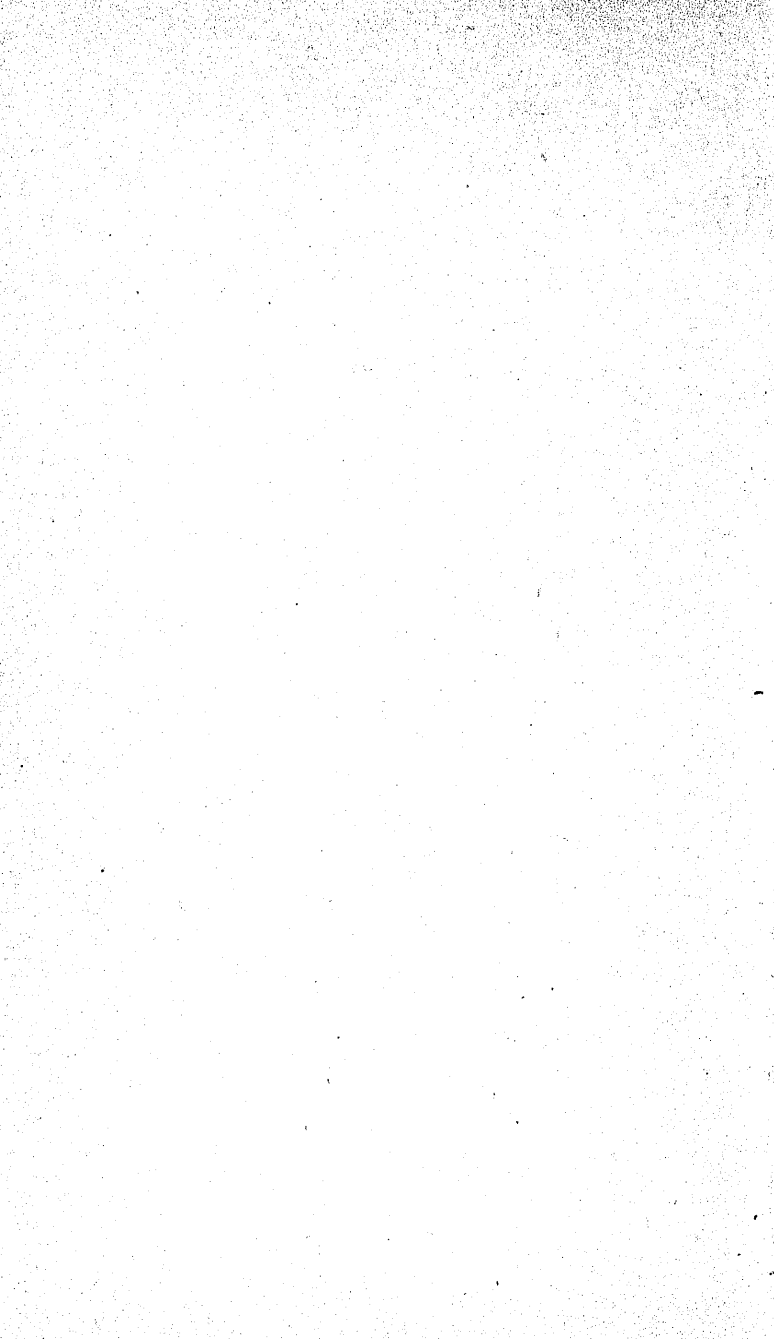
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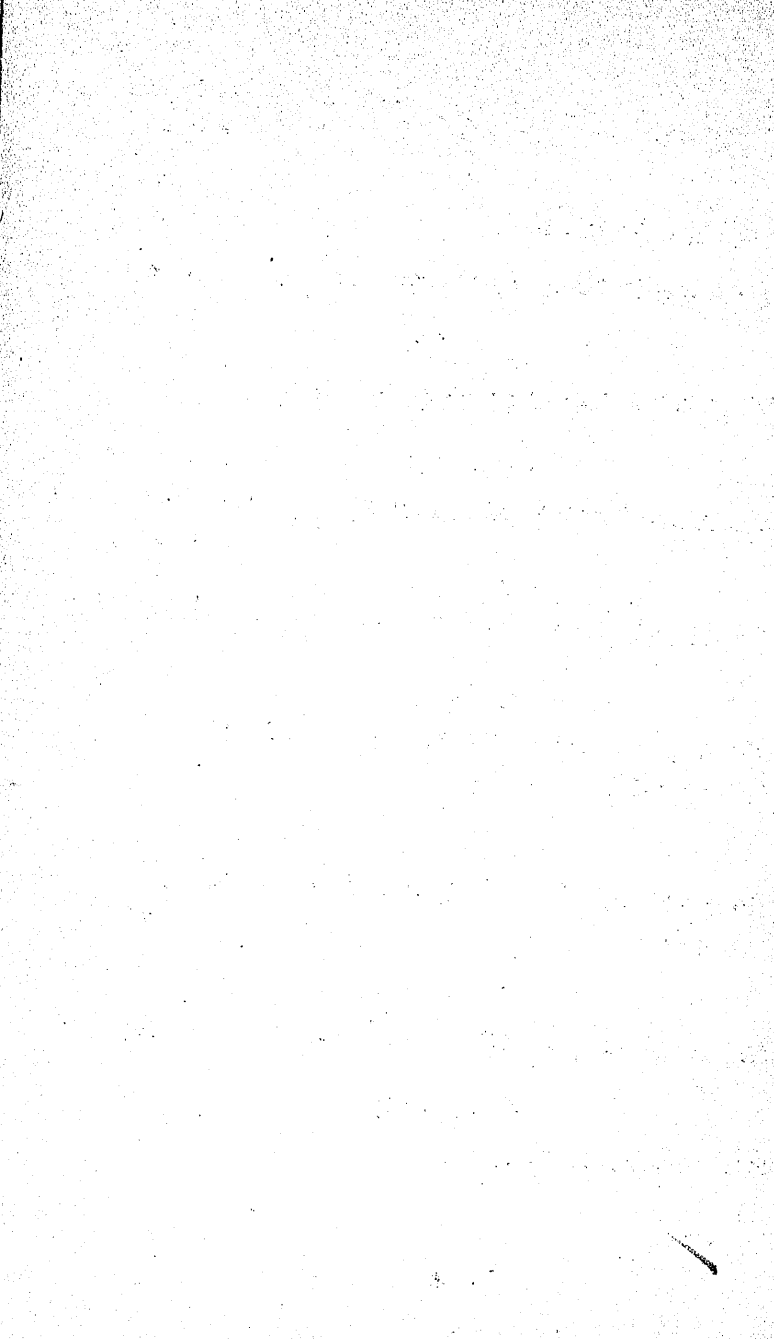
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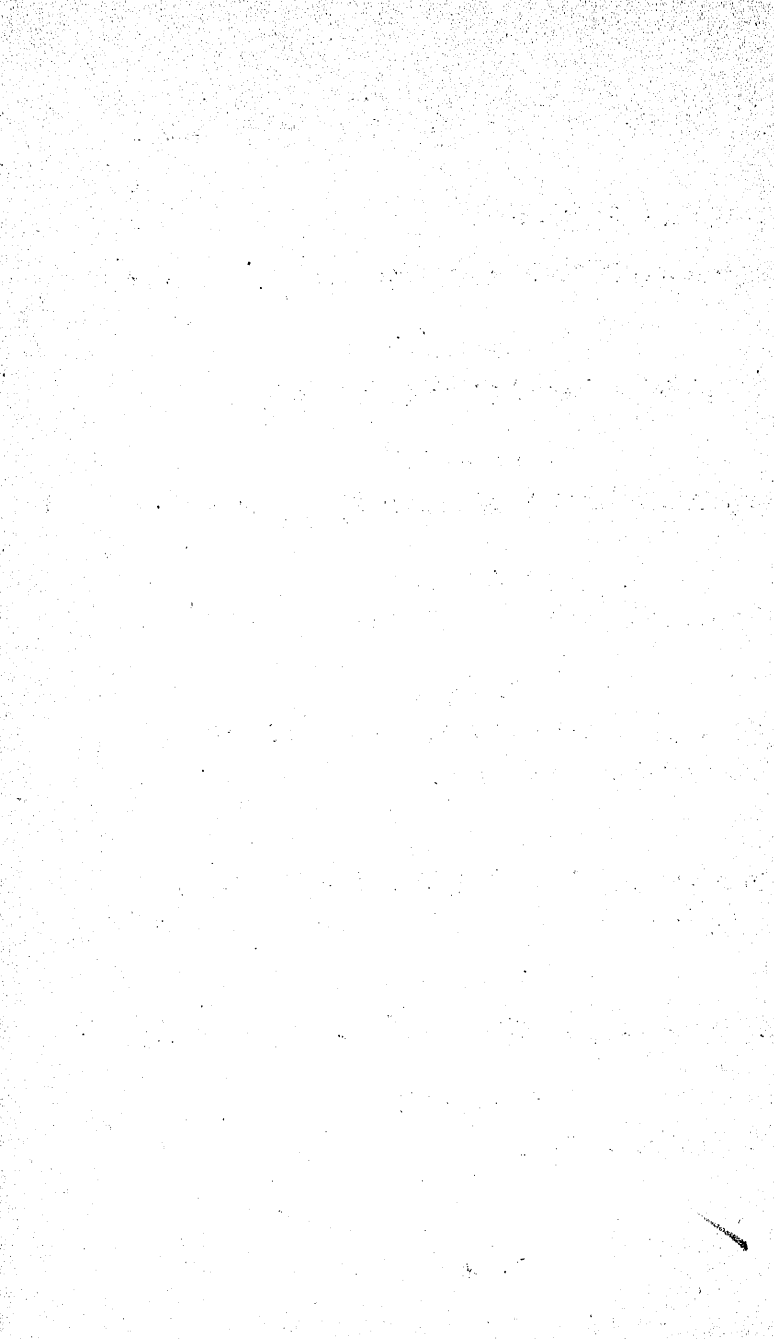
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ILLUSTRATIONS

Portrait of St. Catherine of Siena (after Vanni) *Frontispiece*

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INTRODUCTION

THE life of Saint Catherine of Siena is extraordinarily difficult to write, for the simple reason that she is the subject of at least two of the best biographies of any Saint which already exist in English! The masterly historical monograph of Mr. Edmund Gardner, and the richly-documented work of Mother Francis Raphael Drane are each in their own way unapproachable. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the former for a measure of insight into the Italian politics of the *Quattrocento*, and for one or two irresistible quotations. Mother Francis Raphael's work is of course a Dominican classic, and has already been translated into French and Italian. Thanks to the learned activities of the French Dominicans, it has, however, been possible for me to correct here and there a date or a statement of fact, or to incorporate into this book a recent criticism. The translations are original.

This biography, then, is in no sense intended to compete with any existing work on St. Catherine. It is an attempt to present, as simply and intelligently as possible, with as little historical elaboration as may be, the Life of the great Dominican Tertiary mystic of the *Quattrocento*, who was at the same time one of the most important political figures of her day, in such a way that no one aspect of her career obscures another. If, to avoid confusion and unnecessary detail, the names of minor personages and accounts of less important events have been omitted, these may all be found in the larger biographies. But it is hoped that those who, for one reason or another, are unable or unwilling to study the larger and more important Lives of St. Catherine, may be helped to a clear understanding of her history and her wonderful mission by the present work.

Saint Catherine lived in troublous times. The greater part of Europe, including almost the whole Italian peninsula, was torn and devastated by internecine fighting and cruel wars. In the Dyer's Daughter of Siena, Almighty

God raised up a messenger of Peace, not only to her fellow-country-men, but by a series of strange and mysterious events, to the Church on earth. She became the trusted friend and counsellor of two Popes; it was her voice which finally decided Gregory XI to return from Avignon to Rome. When the great Schism broke in 1378, she spent the last years of her life fighting with tongue and pen for Urban VI, "the true Christ on earth"; and she died like a martyr of the mystical sufferings laid upon her by her Divine Spouse, having offered herself as a victim for the Divisions of Christendom. Saint Catherine's short life is so important from the historical, and so full of incident from the personal standpoint, that only a vivid sketch on broad outlines has been attempted in the present work. This is founded on the *Legenda* of Fra Raimondo da Capua, her confessor and biographer; on the *Processus* of Venice; on Saint Catherine's letters (nearly 400 of which, in whole or in part, have been preserved); and on the wonderful "Dialogue" she dictated to her secretaries in 1378. No Saint ever raised to the altars has ever combined, as did Catherine of Siena, the perfection of the contemplative and the fulness of the active life—the essence of the Spirit of that Order to which she had belonged from her childhood, and in which she proved herself, every moment of her life, a true Daughter of St. Dominic.

The illustrations in the text are taken from woodcuts in two mediæval translations of the *Legenda* of Fra Raimondo da Capua: two from *La Vie de Madame Sainte Katherine de Seine* (Jean Petit, Paris, 1503); and the rest from the *Hystori und wunderbärlich legend Katherine von Senis* (Augsburg, 1515). That facing page 199 is from the *Orcharde of Syon*, a translation of the "Dialogue" of St. Catherine made by the chaplain of the Brigittine nuns of Syon Abbey, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde (London, 1519). The originals are in the British Museum. The portrait of St. Catherine, which forms the frontispiece, is from the original engraving of Vanni's picture of the Saint, published by Gigli (*L'opere della Serafica Santa Caterina da Siena*. Siena, 1707). As two excellent bibliographies for the Life of St. Catherine

have already been given in the biographies mentioned, it was not thought necessary to add a third to the present work; but I must acknowledge my indebtedness to M. Salembier's *Le Grand Schisme de l'Occident* (Paris, 1900), on which part of this book is based.

I must express my grateful thanks to the Right Reverend Dom Cabrol, O.S.B., Abbot of Farnborough, and also to the Very Reverend Father Bede Jarrett, O.P., Prior of Haverstock Hill, for the loan of valuable books from the libraries of their respective houses.

C. M. ANTONY.

London.

Feast of St. Rose of Lima.

August 30th, 1915.



P R E F A C E

EVERYBODY loves Catherine Benincasa because she was always and everywhere a woman in every fibre of her being.

Those of her contemporaries who had no ear for her words, no sympathy with her ways, nor understanding of her mission, were quickly subdued by the charm of her personality. Her undoubted powers of intellect, her indisputable gift of quick, sure intuition, her wisdom in outlining sane and safe measures of statecraft, her mastery of the most harmonious cadences of a musical language, no doubt enhanced, but did not alter essentially, the engaging beauty of her character. What her contemporaries—and the world since her time—have always associated with her name is a dignity which was queenly in its reserve and delicacy, a tenderness which was motherly in its broad helpfulness and deep self-sacrifice, a simplicity which was maidenly in its utter trustfulness and uncalculating generosity, a confidence in human nature which was childlike in its forgetfulness of past ingratitude and disappointments. Though she was born a plebeian—her own people to this day proudly call her the *Popolana*—yet the unction of a natural nobility of soul and mind was ever visible upon her. By nature and temperament she was fitted to be what she succeeded in remaining to the end—a strong, noble woman, whose greatest strength lay in her tenderness, and whose nobility sprang from her tender femininity.

But Catholics love Catherine Benincasa principally for her sanctity.

This sanctity it is that has insured her the glory of an immortality among men, as it has brought her an immortality of glory before God. To Catholics, who believe that grace perfects and supplements nature, the soft glow of Catherine's womanliness becomes indistinguishable from the snow-white radiance of her holiness. She is, first and foremost, a rare flower of the Faith. She is a trophy of supernatural grace. She is a

masterpiece of the refining, spiritualizing powers of Catholicism. She is a friend, well tried and much trusted, of Jesus Christ. Him she sought from her young days in Holy Scripture and Holy Church, where He lives to impart to us His spirit and help us to reproduce it in our lives.

And Catherine sought nothing more earnestly than to put on Christ, and Him crucified. She would be the spouse of the King of the Five Wounds. Therefore she realized early in life the need of putting off herself completely and entirely. Strong woman that she was, it called for no mean nor unheroic battling to drive away the faults—impatience, censoriousness, a spirit of criticism—which are the inevitable accompaniments of a nervous, vivacious temperament like hers. Outward persecution, indeed, helped to bring under control the hastiness and impetuosity of her nature; but it was within that all the finer battles were fought out. By drawing the sword of penance daily against herself—whom she had learned to know *intus et in pectore* by searching self-examination—she succeeded in crucifying the carnal spirit with its sensitive appetites, in constraining her will to accept the “hard sayings” of Christian reason, and in submitting her mind to the guidance of truth. Yet there was nothing hard or unfeeling, nothing of the Stoic or Indian fanatic, about her self-immolation. For if she arrived early at a state of union with God, it was because she understood from the first the Apostle’s word (Rom. xiii. 10, Heb. x. 38) that the principle and motive and end of all spiritual growth must be a rapturous love of God for His own sake.

The sum total of her spiritual teaching, as also the mainspring of all her striving, was Charity. Knowing full well the Scriptural word, “Whoso abideth in Charity abideth in God,” she bent all her energies to correspond as fully as she could with the graces which the good Master poured out upon her. She lived to love. She loved to love. She made all things oil and fuel to feed the living flame of her love. Therefore, joy and peace—sweetest because most mature fruits of charity—filled her heart, as they illumined her face. Though her body was

racked with exquisite pain, though her eyes rained constant tears of bitter sorrow over the sad plight of Church and State, though the plans upon which she had expended much labour and many tears were cast upon the rocks under her very eyes, though her heart was not strong enough to withstand the impact of her many disappointments, she was withal to the last a true, because a joyous, daughter of St. Dominic, a Christian idealist, a Catholic optimist. For, being a saint, she knew with the assurance of faith that God not only loves man, but is "able to keep" him.

And the Seraphic Mother—as the Church rightly calls her—not only loved man, in whom she saw the Master's image, but sought by every means to help him to reach a happiness such as filled her soul. Of her the words, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself," are eminently true. The many graces which flowed through her soul carried it far out on the sea of humanity, which was then agitated by strong winds from above and dangerous currents from below.

Her mercy for the miserable—chiefest among whom is the sinner—was the most obvious and characteristic sign of her love of God. Because she loved God she loved God's handiwork. Because God is Beauty, she would see His Beauty reflected as fully and unbrokenly as possible in the mirror of every human soul. Through her prayers, her sympathy, her helpfulness, her personal devotion to the sinner, the criminal, and the infirm, she tried to free the window of the soul from the dust and grime which sin had spread over it, thereby shutting out the light of God's grace and goodness. She had no social programme except individual return to God's love through penance and detestation of sin.

And because a dream of peace and concord among men for Christ's sake floated ever before her mind, she was able to soar high above the puny, shortsighted schemes of the world-politics and statecraft of her times. Hatred and wars—those two most flagrant contradictions of Charity—she well knew could never be done away with for ever until men could be brought somehow to understand the utilities of a common fellowship in Christ.

But in her philosophy this brotherhood was only possible through the Church, which was in her poetically mystical language the "House of Holy Reconciliation" for all men. At that time, however, this house was hopelessly disorganized because its lawful master, the Pope, was far away in sunny Avignon, a voluntary exile by the broad waters of the Rhone, sustained by the bread of dependence which the King of France, "the new Pilate," as Petrarch scornfully called him, threw to him with none too good a grace. Catherine—who was scandalized, as was every Italian patriot, by the sight of an absentee Pope whose preference for a corner of Provence to the patrimony of St. Peter was the root cause of all civic and religious disorders in Italy—sought to bring back "the sweet Father in Christ" to his own true home by the tomb of the Apostles. The wisest stroke of her diplomacy was dealt when she succeeded in leading the Pontiff Romewards. With the Pope in Rome, the peace of Italy seemed assured.

But hardly had Urban VI succeeded Gregory XI at the rudder of St. Peter's Barque than his stubbornness, hardness of character and precipitateness drove it upon the sharp rocks of schism and internal division. In vain Catherine pleaded with him to mitigate his harshness and violence. But as he persisted in his headstrong and arbitrary ways the dyer's daughter, having naught else left to give, offered her life for the return of Peace to the Church of Christ. Hence, we may justly look upon her as an unbloody martyr for Holy Mother Church.

Catherine of Siena lives to-day in the minds and hearts of all true Christians because she took the Master at His word when He bade her be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect. And because she accepted the Gospel standards of spiritual living she early reached the high tablelands where the Good Shepherd feeds His sheep on the rich pastures of contemplation. In accepting the Scriptures as her life's *vade mecum* she had humility and common sense enough to know that certain details of action and behaviour in the God-Man's life are only to serve as ideals. Hence she wisely followed the spirit of the Gospel in those things that show forth the Divine mission

of the Saviour. But just because she caught the spirit of the Gospel she was able to maintain a sane attitude and adopt a sensible course of action in her manifold works for individuals, the Tuscan cities and the Church.

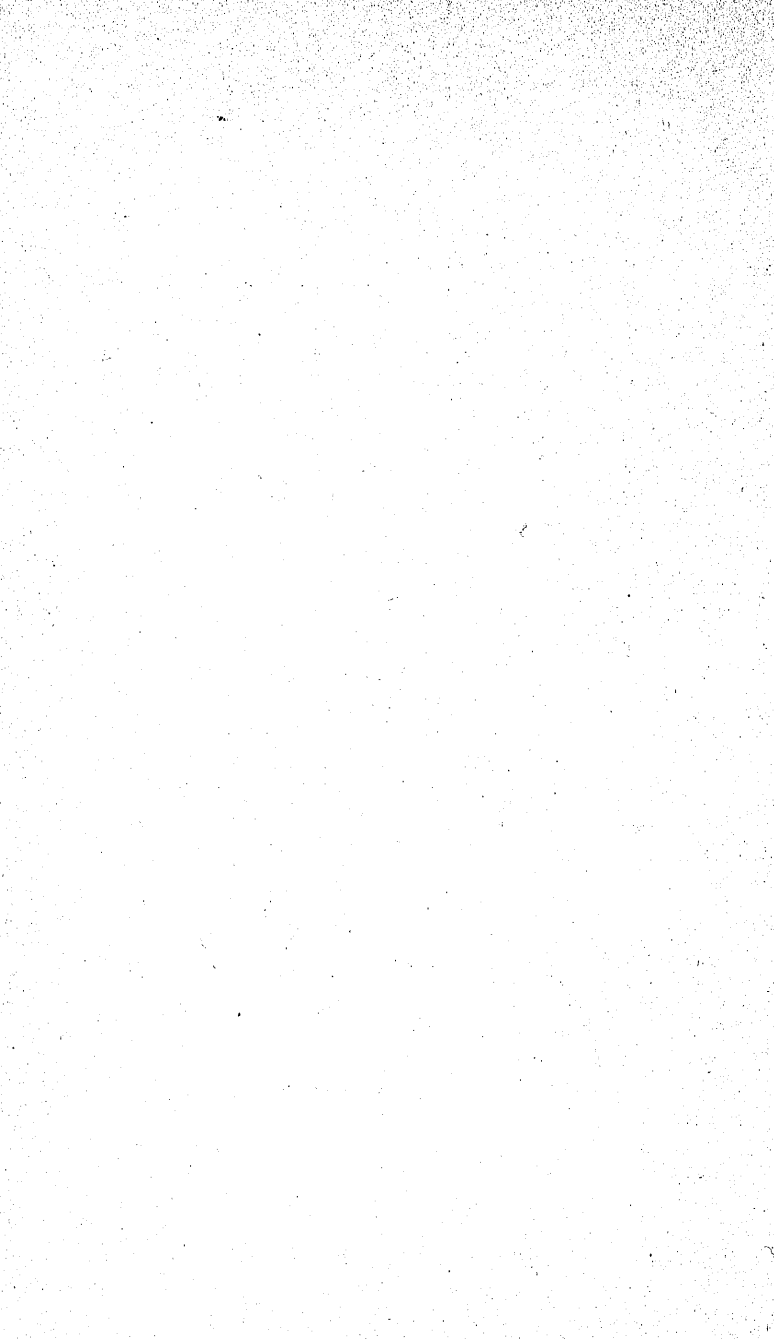
Her life-story will always be full of inspiration and practical suggestiveness, because in her own sanctification she followed the Gospel laws of spirituality to the letter, and in her social action made the spirit of the Gospel her own. If she is modern in the best and fullest sense of the word, it is precisely because she built on Gospel foundations that can never be shaken or grow old, simply because they are Divine. Hence, she can teach our age the salutary lesson that the only cure for its downright worldliness—which St. Ambrose long ago declared to be but the Christian name for paganism of manners—is to be found in a whole-hearted return to the arms of God through love.

These lessons—and many more—can easily be understood by all who read attentively this golden book. It is full of the soft air of Italy and the changing colours of the *Quattrocento*. It palpitates with an understanding sympathy for the ideals, work and mission of the Sienese Saint. Because to the eyes of our age—darkened and holden by many false, ignoble ideals—it pictures in delicate colours the true character of Catherine, this book deserves the widest circulation everywhere.

FR. THOMAS M. SCHWERTNER, O.P.

New York City.

August 4th, 1915.



SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA: HER LIFE AND TIMES

CHAPTER I

THE REMOTE PREPARATION

(1347-1367)

(1)

ON the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, 1347, there was born in a humble house of one of the fairest of the Tuscan cities of the *Quattrocento*, a baby girl who was to help to win for Siena, the "City of the Virgin," the second of her proud titles—the "City of Saints."

Catherine Benincasa, the *Beata Popolana*, as the Sieneſe were later to acclaim her, was a daughter of the people. Her father, Giacomo, the wool-dyer of Fontebranda, was a simple, loyal, God-fearing man, "separated from every vice," as his daughter's biographer tells us; and of a gentle, just, and most forgiving nature. His wife, Lapa di Puccio di Piagente, whom the same authority declares to have been free from the common defects of her country-women, was "industrious, prudent, and skilled in all domestic affairs." To this excellent couple, who were well-to-do and even rich until some twenty years after Catherine's birth, no less than twenty-five children were born, of whom the greater number probably died young. Catherine, herself the twenty-third or twenty-fourth child, had a twin-sister Giovanna, who, like herself, "frail and feeble by nature," died a few days after her birth. All her mother's love and tenderness were concentrated on the surviving baby, the only one of all her children whom Monna Lapa was able herself to nurse. "Because Catherine abode and that other was dead she nourished her more diligently, hoping that she was chosen to abide, and to be God's child." Catherine, however, soon outgrew her delicacy, and as a young girl was

possessed of exceptional physical strength. But she ever remained the favourite daughter of the simple, well-meaning mother, who was destined never to understand completely this incomprehensible child of hers, called as she was by God to a mysterious life wholly beyond Lapa's comprehension. In fact, the touching story, pathetic almost to pain, of the relations between mother and daughter, forms one of the most human and beautiful episodes in the drama of Catherine's life, crowded as it was with relationships and friendships of all sorts, natural and supernatural.

No Saint has been more closely, more mystically united to our Divine Lord than Catherine of Siena; to none was a greater number of close and tender human ties permitted. She, the Spouse of Christ, utterly detached as she was from all that could weigh down her soaring spirit and bind her to things of earth—she who from the dawn of reason consecrated herself wholly and entirely to her Divine Lover, to whose love she was indeed to be crucified—was yet, because of her singleness and purity of heart, Catherine the perfect friend; the beloved of men and women, of priest and religious, of great lady and learned layman. She was not merely a popular heroine, admired and revered because of her holy life, her wondrous deeds, and the marvels that she wrought. She was this—and more. As child, as young girl, as grown woman, she was deeply and truly loved as daughter, sister, "Mother." In her are displayed all the possibilities of spiritual friendship, close, tender, beautiful, and from a human standpoint entirely absorbing. In this regard no other Saint has ever been quite like Catherine of Siena. She, surely, above all others, is the patron Saint of holy friendship.

Naturally warm-hearted and affectionate, she was devoted to her parents, and to those of her brothers and sisters who had not already left the Fullonica, as the dyer's house was called. The eldest son, Benincasa, was now a young man who, the year before Catherine's birth, had set up in business for himself. He married early, as did the second surviving son, Bartolo, whose wife, Lisa, was to become one of Catherine's best friends. The brother

of whom we hear most during her childhood is Stefano. He was probably two or three years older than Catherine, and their busy mother, after the manner of her kind, seems to have put one baby to take care of the other—a responsibility which Stefano evidently accepted gravely and conscientiously, as we learn from the beautiful story related of the pair; and as those who have watched a tiny Italian boy or girl in charge of an even smaller mite can readily imagine.

Catherine's favourite sister, Bonaventura, and two others, Niccoluccia and Maddalena, all married early; while a fourth, Lisa, fell a victim to the plague which ravaged Tuscany in 1374. The youngest of Lapa's children, a little girl named Giovanna, "to renew the memory of the departed sister of Catherine," died in 1363. Giacomo's sons, according to the Tuscan custom, brought their wives to their father's house—that house as to whose holy and gentle ruling one of the good man's daughters bore such striking witness. For Bonaventura, not long after her marriage, "fell into such sickness that from day to day more and more she waxed lean, and vanished almost away, and right feeble." Her husband, Niccolo Tegliacci, who loved her tenderly, sought anxiously to know the cause of her illness. She told him that he and his friends used words "of such dishonest matter, without any refraining of tongue," as she had never been accustomed to hear in her father's house, and that if such language was used in her new home she would assuredly die. So much struck was Niccolo that he forbade his friends henceforth to speak a single coarse or evil word which might offend his young wife, and set an example himself to such good purpose that Bonaventura speedily recovered.

Catherine began her mission of attracting souls almost before she could walk. She was evidently one of those enchanting Tuscan *bambine* whom to see is to love. Fair-haired, grey-eyed, like many a pure-blooded Sieneese, from the time she could walk alone, a plump, toddling bundle, everyone who saw her loved her. So says Fra Raimondo da Capua, her Dominican confessor and biographer, who obtained information as to all the facts

in his beautiful *Legenda* of which he was not personally a witness from the first-hand evidence of others who beheld them. As soon as little Catherine could speak "her conversation was so filled with wisdom and discretion that it was with difficulty her mother could keep her at home." Doubtless the neighbours picked up the pretty baby sitting on the doorsteps, or playing with Stefano in the dusty street, and carried her home "in order to listen to her childlike reasonings and to enjoy her baby sweetness." That Catherine must have been unusually attractive even in that country of delightful children we may be sure, from the fact that the popular name given to her by her mother's friends was Euphrosyne, which, again to quote Fra Raimondo, "signifies joy and satisfaction. Perhaps," adds the good Friar, "they were ignorant of this meaning, and did not know what I learnt later, that Catherine had resolved to imitate St. Euphrosyne; and it may be also that in her childish phrases she uttered some words resembling Euphrosyne, and those who repeated these words gave her this name." Her speech and manner—the manner of a child of three or four—were so striking, so full of supernatural joy and gladness, that it was impossible to be sad in little Catherine's presence. All trouble, all vexation was forgotten, and peace overflowed the souls of those who saw and spoke to her—a peace so wonderful that Fra Raimondo compares it to that of the Apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration, who exclaimed "*Bonum est nos hic esse.*" This peace and joy was the foretaste of that which was steadily to radiate from the burning love which consumed her soul throughout her wonderful life; the reflection of that which shone upon her from the Divine Face of her crucified Spouse.

The keynote of Catherine's life was Joy. Yet if ever a Saint had cause to be discouraged, it was she. Not even St. Francis of Assisi himself was more perfectly informed with that childlike spirit of happiness, of sweet gaiety, which turns the gloomiest happenings to occasions of thanksgiving; which finds, in the most cruel and unexpected misfortunes, that here alone is perfect joy. Taking into consideration the times in which she lived,



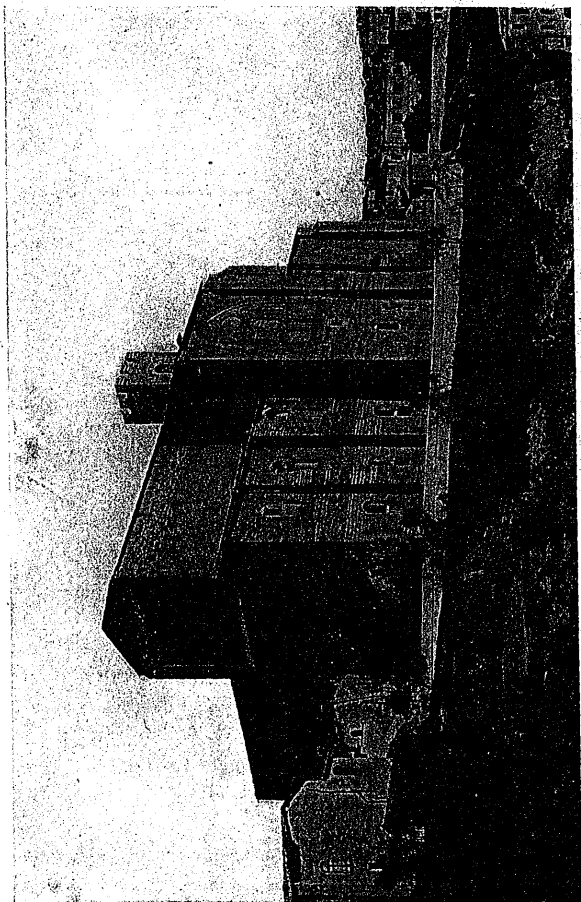


Photo. Alinari.

THE CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO, SIENA

and her full and complete understanding of and participation in them, it is scarcely too much to claim that Catherine of Siena is the world's greatest optimist.

Before she was five she began—as soon as she could manage to creep up and down the steep stone stairway by herself—to recite a Hail Mary on each of the steps, accompanying the prayer with a genuflexion. Such practices were not unknown, doubtless, among the children of such a house as Giacomo Benincasa's. We may be sure that Catherine had her small imitators, for a year or two later we find her the leader of a band of other tiny girls, who loved to listen to her as she talked of holy things, and to copy as far as possible her penances and devout practices. What these were we shall presently see. But Catherine imitated nobody. She prayed as she climbed the stairway simply because she loved God, and, as she assured her confessor long afterwards, in order to raise her mind from things visible to things invisible. It was to encourage her and reward her for her perseverance in this pious practice that Almighty God granted her the first of her wonderful visions—a vision which changed the child's whole life.

When she was six her mother sent her with Stefano one day on an errand to Bonaventura's house, and as the children were returning by the Valle Piatta towards Fontebranda, in which quarter the Fullonica was situated, Catherine chanced to glance upward towards the beautiful city rising radiant above her into the glowing evening sky. No city in Italy can even to-day compare with Siena in her still unspoilt beauty—"a city out of a missal—one of those exquisite unreal places past which the Magi came to Bethlehem."¹ In Catherine's day Siena was set thick with soaring towers, "like a cane-brake," almost all of which are now destroyed; though the most beautiful of all—some say the most beautiful in Italy—La Mangia of the Palazzo Pubblico, and the visionary fairness of the campanile of the marble cathedral, set on the highest point of Siena's triple hill, still remain to us. As little Catherine stood gazing up through the silvery olives and dark ilexes her eyes, however, turned to the vast

¹ E. Hutton, *Siena and Southern Tuscany*, p. 72, q.v. (Methuen, 1910.)

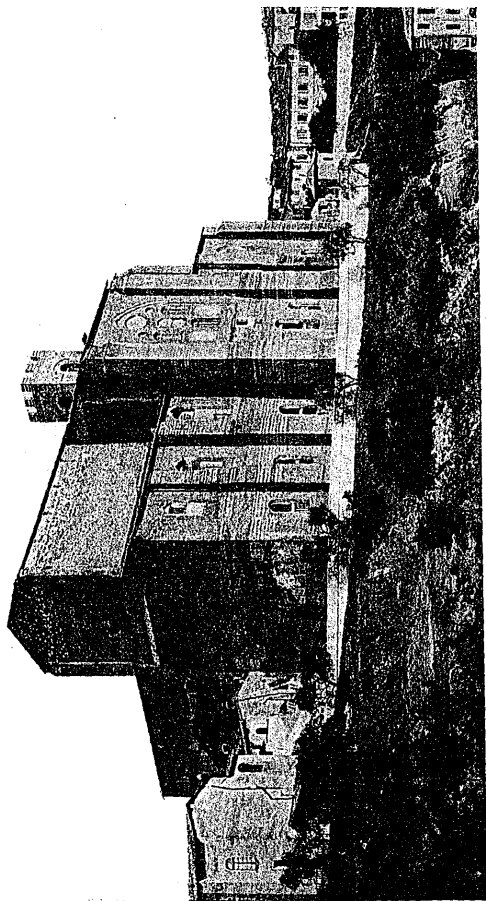


Photo. Alinari.

THE CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO, SIENNA

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When she was six her mother sent her with Stefano one day on an errand to Bonaventura's house, and as the children were returning by the Valle Piatta towards Fontebranda, in which quarter the Fullonica was situated, Catherine chanced to glance upward towards the beautiful city rising radiant above her into the glowing evening sky. No city in Italy can even to-day compare with Siena in her still unspoilt beauty—"a city out of a missal—one of those exquisite unreal places past which the Magi came to Bethlehem."¹ In Catherine's day Siena was set thick with soaring towers, "like a cane-brake," almost all of which are now destroyed; though the most beautiful of all—some say the most beautiful in Italy—La Mangia of the Palazzo Pubblico, and the visionary fairness of the campanile of the marble cathedral, set on the highest point of Siena's triple hill, still remain to us. As little Catherine stood gazing up through the silvery olives and dark ilexes her eyes, however, turned to the vast

¹ E. Hutton, *Siena and Southern Tuscany*, p. 72, q.v. (Methuen, 1910.)

bulk and huge simplicity of San Domenico, the church of the Preaching Friars, so close to her own home. "There she saw, on the gable end of the church of the Dominicans, a splendid throne, on which sat our Lord Jesus Christ, clad in pontifical ornaments, His sacred brow adorned with a tiara. At His side stood St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John the Evangelist."

At this wondrous sight the child stood rapt in silent awe, seeing nothing but the vision, deaf to all sounds of



earth, "ravished in contemplation with love to Him who thus manifested Himself to her, to captivate entirely the heart she had already offered to Him." Then our Lord smiled sweetly and tenderly on the little girl, and raising His hand gave her His blessing "in the form of a cross, as is customary with Bishops"; while Catherine remained motionless, gazing up to heaven.

Stefano, who was doubtless accustomed to his little

sister's ways, went steadily along the path, thinking that if Catherine had stopped to pray she would soon follow on. Finding, however, that she did not come he turned round, and seeing her gazing upward he shouted to her as loudly as he could. She paid no attention. The little boy was probably tired and hungry. After he had called many times in vain he went back to his sister and took her by the hand. "Come on," he cried, "why are you stopping here?" But Catherine had not heard him at all. She appeared to wake from a deep sleep, and looking earnestly at him exclaimed: "O Stefano, if you saw what I see you would never have disturbed me in watching so beautiful a vision!"

We can picture the children standing hand-in-hand beneath the olives, gazing up at the towering walls of the great church, Stefano seeing nothing, half-ashamed, half-inclined to scold; Catherine weeping bitterly because when she turned away her eyes the vision had disappeared with the evanescence of a swiftly-dying rainbow. He heard her, as he led her unresisting down the path, reproach herself for having lowered her eyes. But we may be sure he held her tiny hand tightly until he had brought this strange little sister safe home to their mother's door.

From this time Catherine ceased to be a child, in all but years. "Her soul was filled with such perfect love that she left off all her childish habits, and consecrated herself . . . to penance and meditation." Children develop early in the south, but she was only six. We are, however, told that her manner, her words, her acts, and above all her virtues, would have done credit to men of ripe age. God so kindled the flame of Divine Love in her soul that all her qualities of mind, soul, and spirit flowered early; her will grew strong, her memory developed, and "all she did was in conformity with the Gospel." Above all, she feared to offend God by the smallest sin. Later in life she disclosed to Fra Raimondo that at this time she had a Divine Revelation of the life of the Fathers of the Desert and of other saints, particularly of St. Dominic. Without any human teaching, and unable as she was to read, Catherine experienced the strongest desire to follow their example; and so intense

was this wish that she could think of nothing else. She made herself a little discipline, and sought for lonely spots in which she could use it upon her childish body. She seemed at the same time to lose all desire to play, and for the merry talk which had been her chief attraction ; while her appetite daily diminished, and she ate very little food.

Then it was that the other children gathered round her, delighting to imitate her austerities ; meeting " in a secret place " as far as possible removed from discovery by their elders, and repeating the Pater and Ave after Catherine as often as she bade them do so. Thus did her first group of disciples gather round the future Saint.

Other and supernatural signs were not wanting that this child was not like other children. Lapa, her mother, who always held her daughter's austerities in horror, told Fra Raimondo that she herself had often seen Catherine carried to the top of the stairs without touching a single step with her feet, and that so swiftly that the mother trembled lest her child should fall. Already Catherine lived in communion with the angels. This favour was always the result of some special act of self-denial on the little girl's part.

The thought of the solitary lives of the Fathers of the Desert filled Catherine's mind with a great desire to become a hermit ! Fra Raimondo tells us that she was ignorant how to accomplish this project ; and God, Who destined her to another manner of life, " left her to the dreams of her imagination." The story which follows reminds us vividly of a similar happening in the life of St. Teresa of Avila. " One morning Catherine set forth in search of the desert. She prudently provided herself with a loaf of bread, and went towards the house of her married sister, who lived near one of the gates of Siena. For the first time in her life she left the city, and as soon as she perceived the valley, in which houses were scattered, but not close together as they were in the town, she thought she had come to the desert. Having found a little cave under a shelving rock on the hill-side she joyfully entered in, convinced she was at last in her longed-for solitude." Here she began to pray and to praise God,

and as she prayed was lifted, little by little, to the very roof of the grotto, "remaining thus till the hour of None. Catherine, presuming this was a snare of Satan to distract her, and turn her from her holy purpose, increased the fervour of her prayers. At length, about the hour in which our Saviour completed His sufferings upon the Cross, she descended to the earth, and God revealed to her that the moment of sacrifice had not yet come, and that she was not to leave her father's house. On leaving the little cave she became rather frightened at finding herself so far from the town, and dreaded to think of the trouble of her parents, who would believe she was lost. Then she recommended herself to God, and . . . in the twinkling of an eye the holy child found herself at the gate of Siena, whence she speedily returned home, and never disclosed this circumstance to any but her confessors, of whom I am the last, and most unworthy."

Here we have the natural human child, eager for adventure—like the boy who runs away to sea with his mind filled with the stories he has read of pirates and treasure-islands—completely supernaturalized by grace. From her babyhood Catherine's greatest desire was to fulfil the Will of God. She set out for her "desert" in obedience, as she believed, to that Will. But as soon as she learnt her mistake she was not disobedient to the Heavenly Vision. The child had already mastered the first—and the last, as well as the hardest—lesson of the saintly life. Daily, like the Holy Child of Nazareth, she grew "in wisdom, and in stature, and in favour with God and man." Religious phenomena were by no means uncommon in the fourteenth century, and Catherine's perfect simplicity and obedience, and her naturally attractive, affectionate nature opened all hearts to her, so that she escaped much criticism, and her unusual devotions were at first little noticed.

At the age of seven, when in our colder northern lands it would be difficult to believe that such a child could realize the meaning of her own intention, Catherine, inspired by the Holy Ghost, who taught her that purity of soul and body was the most acceptable gift she could lay at the feet of our Divine Lord, made a solemn vow

to dedicate herself without spot to God for the rest of her life ; imploring the help of the Queen of Angels and of Virgins to help her to live on earth the Angelic Life. " I promise Thy Son and I promise Thee," concluded her innocent prayer, " never to accept any other spouse than He, and to preserve myself to the best of my power, pure and undefiled." This dedication of her life she made, " having maturely reflected and prayed much."

After this she increased her self-imposed austerities. Though her entire abstinence from food during the last years of her life is of course miraculous—as are the twenty years during which she existed on almost nothing—she had as a little child begun to discipline her naturally healthy appetite so as to do without meat entirely, and merely to keep body and soul together by what she ate. Still, as we shall see, this did not affect her physical strength for a long time. And there were so many round the hospitable board at the Fullonica that the child's self-denial was unnoticed. The meat served to her she passed quietly to her brother Stefano, who sat next her, and had no scruples as to receiving it ; or gave to the cats, like-minded, under the table. She increased her disciplines, and within her heart increased constantly the burning desire to save the souls of others, and to imitate all those saints, especially St. Dominic, who had spent their lives in so labouring. Her mother, whose hasty and bitter tongue was to cause so much suffering to Catherine for many years to come, was impressed, in spite of herself, with her daughter's patience under rebuke. She herself related to Fra Raimondo that when Catherine was about ten she sent her on one occasion to San Domenico to ask for a Mass to be said in honour of St. Antony, bidding the child to offer the priest the usual stipend, and to buy candles to burn on the altar. Catherine fulfilled the commission, and remained to hear the Mass. Of this Lapa was ignorant, and thinking that Catherine had been loitering on the way home, scolded her sharply when she appeared, making use of the usual violent expressions common among Tuscan *popolane*, in which the word " cursed " frequently occurred. Catherine listened in silence, but shortly after, coming up to her mother, she

explained very gently what she had been doing, and begged Lapa, however much she herself might deserve a scolding for her many faults, never to curse anyone for her sake. Lapa, relieved and astonished, treasured this, and many other such stories of Catherine's childhood, in her heart.

We know nothing of the age at which Catherine made her first Confession and Communion, or of her Confirmation, but she was surely strengthened with the grace of these Sacraments when her first great trial came upon her. She was twelve years old—the age at which Tuscan girls were usually sought and given in marriage. After this time, according to custom, she never left her father's house alone. Neither her parents nor her brothers and sisters knew anything of the solemn vow she had taken to consecrate herself wholly to Almighty God; and Lapa's thoughts naturally turned to the selection of a suitable husband for this well-loved and charming daughter. Catherine, says Fra Raimondo, was not “of excessive beauty”; but she was young and sweet, with a delightful and attractive manner. Her austerities had not affected her health, and she had, we are specially told, an abundance of beautiful golden-brown hair, always admired by Italians. Her mother sought to make the most of her daughter's natural gifts by dressing her in the height of the prevailing fashion, with bare arms and neck; and by adorning her with jewellery and ornaments. Catherine endured these attentions unwillingly, for she knew what they signified. Though she made no objection at first, there was evidently in her no desire to please, and her perplexed mother talked the matter over with her married daughter, Bonaventura, who gradually induced her favourite sister to take an interest in her appearance, and to dress—and even bleach—her beautiful hair in the mode of Sienese ladies of that day.

“In nothing was the growing luxuriousness of the Sienese more manifest than in the matter of dress,” says a recent writer.¹ Sumptuary laws had been passed from time to time since the thirteenth century, but “the passion for self-adornment that had taken possession of

¹ Langton Douglas, *History of Siena*, p. 128. (John Murray, 1902.)

the women of Siena was not to be suppressed, or even checked." A hermit of Lecceto, in the Sienese *contado*, wrote not long after Catherine's death that Sienese women "fixed all their thoughts on the painting and adornment of their accursed bodies!" St. Bernardine, himself a native of the city, born the year of Catherine's death, declared that the Sienese ladies painted themselves more shamelessly than any women he knew of. "Whoever wrings out one of their dresses," he exclaims, "will see blood flowing from it. Nay, the very cloak upon their shoulders is stained with blood."

But though Bonaventura succeeded for a short time in making her young sister look like any other girl of her age, nothing she could say would persuade Catherine to renounce her vow. "She accused herself of this fault (of vanity)," says Fra Raimondo, "with so many tears and sobs that one might suppose she had committed some great crime." But in answer to his inquiries Catherine always declared that in regard to her vow she had never wavered. Indeed, her austerities continued unabated; she fled from the conversation, and even the sight of men "as if they were serpents"—excepting those of her own family. That this was not due to prudishness, or a natural dislike for masculine society, Catherine's later life was to bear unmistakable witness. She desired to stave off as long as possible the now inevitable demand for her hand in marriage, which would naturally follow her appearance in public. And to Fra Raimondo, long afterwards, she accused herself with bitter tears of having preferred to the Will of God the giving pleasure to Bonaventura. For though her resolution was unchanged she knew well that her fervour in prayer and meditation was gradually abating. This was the "great sin"—or rather what "her all but utter whiteness held for sin" of Catherine's life.

This period of temptation and distress seems to have lasted for two or three years, ceasing with Bonaventura's death in 1362, when Catherine was fifteen. This bereavement had two immediate results: on Catherine's part to break free for ever from the vanities of this world, to devote herself with new ardour to her Divine Spouse,

and to conceive a special devotion to St. Mary Magdalene, whose contrition she desired to imitate; while on the other hand her parents and relations redoubled their endeavours to induce her to accept a husband. Bonaventura was dead: Catherine, as a young married woman, must now fill her sister's place in the family circle. No means were left untried to convince the young girl of the folly and uselessness of resisting her friends' wishes. Her parents applied to a young Dominican Father, a connection by marriage, who had been brought up among the Benincase, and had known Catherine from babyhood. This priest was Fra Tommaso della Fonte, the Saint's first confessor, and life-long friend. Him they begged to dissuade Catherine from what they considered the fancy of a foolish girl, and induce her to become a normal, sensible young woman, ready and willing to accept a husband of her parents' choosing, and to settle down in a home of her own.

Lapa, good, stupid woman as she was, loved her daughter with an affection entirely natural; while good Giacomo, already advancing in years, was doubtless too much occupied with his many family cares, and the business of directing his workmen, who lived in the house—and also, we may clearly infer from the *Legenda*, too much under his wife's influence—either clearly to understand Catherine's case, or boldly to interfere in it. Such was the state of affairs when Catherine, in her sixteenth year, after a long and earnest conversation, so thoroughly convinced Fra Tommaso of her inflexible determination to keep her vow that his conscience obliged him to support her. Courageously—for he must have known the storm of wrath his action would bring down on his own head, he advised the young girl, if indeed she were of this mind, to cut off all her thick golden hair, her chief natural beauty. This he said, thinking—as a man would think—that when her mother's first anger was over, Catherine would be left in peace. Catherine “received this advice as coming from Heaven,” and taking her scissors, she immediately cut off her long, beautiful hair, which she already regarded as the cause of her fault, and of all her troubles.

But excellent as was Fra Tommaso's intention in advising her, this act, as might have been expected by anyone less unworldly than the good Friar and Catherine, was to the latter the real beginning of sorrows.

(2)

CATHERINE, with her hastily-shorn head covered with a white veil, was not allowed to remain long in peace. Her mother soon discovered what had happened, and her cries of anger filled the house, while the family came running to know what could be the matter. It was quite certain now that—at least until her hair grew long again—Catherine's hand could be offered to no man. The entire family, "all in unison, gave way to violent anger."

Then began for the girl a really cruel persecution. Looking upon her determination as merewilfulness and obstinacy—for neither now nor at any other time did Catherine ask leave to enter a convent; and the only two courses open to a girl of the Middle Ages were the religious life and marriage—the whole household seems to have attempted to bring her to her senses. They told her plainly, with many hard words and much harsh treatment, that she would not be allowed to cut off her hair a second time, but that when it had grown she should certainly be married according to their wishes. Her gentle appeal to her brothers failed. She offered to live on bread and water, to be no charge to the family, to do anything they liked short of altering her condition, if only she might be left in peace to serve God in her own way.

But their pride was up in arms. This strong spirit must be broken! With the characteristic coarseness of the times, they decided that henceforth she should be allowed no solitude. Her own room was taken away from her. She might sleep where she could. She chose the room of her young brother Stefano, who was absent all day, and who slept so soundly at night that he would not be disturbed by her devotions. For herself, she was now able to do almost entirely without sleep—the hardest won of all the victories over herself, as she afterwards

confessed to Fra Raimondo. Did she remember that St. Dominic himself had chosen to have no cell of his own? It is difficult to doubt it, and the thought must have cheered her. But this was only the beginning. She was to have no leisure for her devotions. She was to become the servant of all. The kitchen-maid was sent away, and Catherine, who at the outset of these troubles was so strong that, as her mother often related, she could lift and carry a horse's load from the street door to the attic, up two flights of stairs, was put in her place.

It is difficult to account for her good father's connivance in this cruel and public humiliation. Though, however, the father was master of the whole house, the daughters were, after all, the mother's affair, and if Lapa was determined on this course of ungentle treatment, then Giacomo, sadly we may be sure, refrained from any active interference. But we can imagine his kind eyes following Catherine as she sped about her household tasks—not sulkily or in any spirit of martyrdom, but gaily and joyously—with a growing wonder as to what manner of child this strange little daughter of his would prove to be.

Catherine, for her part, was already absorbed in God through her household tasks. She cooked the dinner for the family, she brought it to table, and waited on them all as they ate and drank. To her it was a sacramental act. "Her father represented to her our dear Saviour, her mother the Blessed Virgin, while her brothers and sisters and the other members of the household were the Apostles and disciples of Our Lord," so that they wondered to see her bright and happy face, not understanding. Her kitchen became her sanctuary, and when, the rest served and satisfied, she finally seated herself at table, "she nourished her soul with the Presence of her Saviour." Nor did she even miss the solitude of her own room. "The Holy Spirit had taught her to create a little cell in the interior of her soul, whence she resolved never to come forth, notwithstanding her pressing exterior occupations. When she had a room of her own she was often obliged to leave it, but nothing could oblige her to leave this interior retreat." *Regnum Dei intra nos est.*

Even the affronts "most sensible to a woman's heart," with which she was loaded, had no power to break her will or disturb her calm. A fresh matrimonial alliance was proposed to her. "But again the devil was vanquished." Catherine, cook, kitchen-maid, waitress, and willing servant of all, radiated from her inner sanctuary such overflowing joy and peace that it was evident the plan to break her will had failed, as her brothers reluctantly admitted. At this time she prayed much to St. Cecilia, committing her cause especially to the intercession of that Saint; and her father, watching her secretly and in silence, "comprehended daily more and more that she was doing the Will of God, and not following the fancies of a capricious maiden."

This state of things had continued for at least a year, and probably longer, when a very beautiful and touching incident opened Giacomo's eyes, and eventually led him to discover the truth. Catherine had gone up to Stefano's room for a few minutes, in an interval of housework, and was kneeling in a corner of the empty chamber, praying earnestly, when her father, who had come up for something he wanted, entered the room, "the door being open, her parents having forbidden her to shut it." Looking round for the object which he sought, his eyes fell on Catherine in her corner, wholly unconscious of his presence, a white dove poised above her head; which dove, as Giacomo approached, flew away, as it seemed, through the open window. Startled, he asked his daughter what dove that was, and was amazed and deeply moved when she replied that she had seen no dove, or any other bird in the room. This episode caused him to reflect most seriously on the line he had taken in the treatment of Catherine. He probably spoke of it to the rest of the family; for Fra Raimondo, who relates the story, did not hear it from Giacomo, but from "revelations of cousins that dwelt in his house."

Catherine's life-long devotion to St. Dominic increased daily, and the thought of the help and protection which the habit of the Third Order would afford her in the fulfilment of her vow caused her to desire it earnestly. This desire burnt even more strongly after a certain

vision granted her in a dream. She saw herself surrounded by all the Founders of Religious Orders, amongst whom she recognized St. Dominic by his habit and by the white lily burning like the bush of Moses, but like the bush unconsumed, which he bore in his hand. Each Holy Founder seemed to desire her to choose an Order wherein she might serve God more perfectly.

But her choice was already made. She turned towards her beloved St. Dominic, who approached her with the habit of the Third Order in his hands, bidding her to



be of good heart and very courageous, for she should one day win and wear it. Her tears of thankfulness wakened her; and so strengthened and comforted was she by this heavenly vision, that next day she assembled her family and announced her irrevocable decision. The account of this scene may well be given according to the delightful old English translation.¹ “ ‘Sometime ye said unto me and treated me long time thereof that I should be wedded to a corruptible and a deadly man, though I had abomination of such wedding in mine heart, as ye might clearly perceive by many diverse tokens . . . I shall

¹ The spelling, which adds so greatly to the charm of the original, has been modernized.

declare unto you openly mine heart and purpose, the which purpose is not conceived of new, but of childhood unto this time. In my childhood I made vow of virginity, to serve Our Lord God, Saviour of all the world, and His Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary our glorious Lady, not childly, but with a sad and long avisement and for a great cause. I made a vow also that I should never take husband but Him alone. Therefore now since I am come by the sufferance of Our Lord, to a more perfect age and knowledge and understanding wit, know ye right well that this is the same purpose which is so mighty and strong in my soul that it were more possible hard flintstones should be broken than that mine heart should be withdrawn from its holy purpose. Therefore, the more ye labour about this thing, the more time ye lose.” Catherine repeated this assurance several times, pathetically declaring “if ye will have such an one as me in your house for to be a common servant to serve you all, I am ready, in all I can or may, to do you service gladly. And if ye will put me out of your house I declare to you that in no wise may my holy purpose be changed. I have an Husband and a Spouse Christ Jesu, so richly and so mightily that will not suffer me in no wise to lack nothing. But He will minister to me all that me needeth.”

“When she had said this, all that heard her fell in weeping, and by cause of her plenteously sighing and sobbing they might for that time give none answer.” They considered that it was evidently impossible “to withsay or withstand her will”; and they felt that now indeed they had no more “trust of her wedding, wherefore it liked them better for to weep than for to give her answer.”

But now her father interposed—the father who “loved her so tenderly,” and who “had dread of God,” for Giacomo remembered her patient service and good deeds, and the sign of the dove, and said: “‘Dear daughter, God forbid it that we should will or desire anything against the will of God . . . and now we see indeed that thou art not moved to this by the lightness of childhood, but by fervent charity of God. Make thy vow, therefore, freely, and do as thou wilt and as the

Holy Ghost teacheth thee.' ” Then he added a very tender exhortation, declaring that as her family would henceforth never let her from her holy purpose or her ghostly exercises, she must pray busily for them all, that they be made “ ‘worthy to the promise and behest of her Divine Spouse, whom she had chosen by His special grace in her tender age.’ ” Then he turned him to his wife and to his children and said : ‘None of you from this time forward be to mine dear daughter grievous. Let none be so bold as to try to prevent her from following her holy purpose and to pray for us busily. We might never have found a better husband to her than He is . . . Therefore we have none cause to plain us, sith it so is that we have received now for a deadly man, undeadly God and man to be her Spouse.’ ”¹ When Giacomo had said these words “with wepyng and with weylinge,” Catherine joyfully thanked her Lord who had given her this victory, and also her father and mother “with all manner of lowness ; disposing herself to use profitably the licence that was granted to her.”

Being now free to serve God according to her desire, Catherine begged a little room for herself, no matter how small and inconvenient, and she was given a cell beneath the house, about ten feet by sixteen, whose single small window was approached by a few steps of brick. On the bare walls were a few sacred pictures, before which a lamp was kept continually burning. Her bed was composed of two or three planks without any covering, while a piece of wood served her for a pillow. On these planks she sat when meditating and knelt when praying ; extending herself on them to sleep, without laying aside any portion of her clothing, which was wholly composed of wool. At first she wore a hair-cloth, but as she cherished exterior cleanliness as a figure of interior purity she exchanged this for an iron chain, which she drew round her with such force that it wounded her flesh, as her companions long afterwards told Fra Raimondo. Towards the close of her life she very reluctantly left off wearing this chain, under obedience to her confessor, who considered that in her great bodily weakness she was

¹ “ *Pro mortali homine recipimus Deum et hominem immortalem.* ”

unable to endure such pain. "At first she prolonged her vigils till the hour of Matins; but afterwards she overcame sleep so entirely that she only slept for a short half-hour every other day; and only allowed herself that repose when forced by physical weakness to take it." Her existence was a miracle. Medical men assured Fra Raimondo that it was inexplicable by natural means. At the age of fifteen she renounced wine entirely, and for a long time previously had only taken enough to colour the water which she drank. Meat she had long given up; the very smell of it caused her real suffering. At this time she ate only a little bread and some raw vegetables. Her body began to be weighed down with infirmities and she was often seriously ill; still her physical strength does not on the whole seem to have diminished. During the whole time that Raimondo "had the privilege of witnessing her life, she took no food and no drink that was capable of sustaining her; and this deprivation she supported joyously even when suffering and undergoing extraordinary fatigue." He adds one interesting note: "We must beware of supposing that this was the usual consequence of a certain diet and graduated abstinence. It is evident that her strength was maintained by the ardour of her soul; for when the spirit is stronger than the body, and is satiated with heavenly food, the flesh easily endures the torment of hunger." He compares her miraculous existence to that of the Desert Fathers, remarking that all these "lived in the peace of solitude and the protecting shade of some monastery," while Catherine "was neither in a convent nor in the wild, but in the bosom of her family, without spiritual direction, and surrounded by obstacles of every sort. Yet she attained a degree of abstinence greater than that of any other Saint." He alludes to the fast of Moses, of St. John the Baptist, of St. Mary Magdalene, and writing after Catherine's death, concludes from this examination: "*Non est inventus similis illae.*"

Lapa's distress at these unimaginable austerities was excessive. "A true daughter of Eve," she attempted, in intense but mistaken natural love for her child, to put an end to them. She determined that Catherine should

share her own bed. Here at least would be fine linen and warm coverings. If she could not oblige her child to eat, she would at any rate now get a few hours' comfortable rest. Lapa would enter Catherine's cell, and finding her lying on her plank bed, would "conduct her forcibly" to her own room and oblige the girl to lie down. Falling on her knees before her mother, Catherine would "soften her by words full of humility and sweetness," promising to do as she wished. Then, lying down by her side she would meditate and pray fervently until her mother fell asleep, when Catherine would rise softly and return to her devotions until "Satan, provoked by her constancy, would awaken Lapa." Then Catherine thought out a plan of satisfying both herself and her mother. She managed to slide "one or two planks under the sheets in the place she was to occupy," but Lapa speedily discovered this, and, finding that her endeavours were vain, gave them up in despair, unwillingly permitting her daughter "to follow the Divine inspiration." All this time the hope of entering the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic had been strong in Catherine's heart. Continually she spoke of it to her parents, and it is easy to imagine how Lapa lamented to her husband over this entirely incomprehensible desire. But Giacomo, true to his promise, would not interfere. Catherine applied directly to the Sisters of Penance, but apparently without obtaining an answer. Lapa dared not forbid her daughter to think any more of the matter. She endeavoured to divert Catherine's mind by proposing that they should both pay a visit, as is customary with Italians from time to time, to the public Baths, probably those of Vignone on the river Orcia, a little distance to the south of Siena; thus "becoming, without precisely knowing it, the accomplice of Satan."

Catherine accompanied her mother, but when they arrived she begged that they might enter the baths alone, and when Lapa unsuspectingly agreed Catherine approached that end of the bath where the sulphurous waters poured in heated to boiling point. She suffered intense pain—so great that Fra Raimondo, when informed of the occurrence years later by Lapa, asked

Catherine how she could support such torture and live ? To this she answered, " with the simplicity of a dove," that she had, whilst standing there in the scalding water, thought much on the pains of Purgatory and Hell, beseeching her Creator whom she had so often offended, to accept for the torments she had deserved those she was then enduring, which indeed were more severe than any she had previously inflicted on herself. And heavenly consolation overflowed her soul until she became unconscious of her physical pain.

We cannot wonder that Lapa, on their return to Siena from this expedition, so fruitless as regards her own hopes, made a fresh attempt to turn Catherine from austerities which in her mother's opinion were likely to put an end to her life. But Catherine's only reply was to beg her to request the Mantellate, as the Sisters of Penance were called, to bestow on her the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic. Reluctantly Lapa went on this errand, but the Sisters refused, saying it was not their custom to receive young girls, but only widows of mature age who had consecrated themselves to God ; and that this was necessary, as they kept no enclosure, but each Sister lived according to her Rule in her own home. Lapa was of course delighted, but Catherine prevailed upon her to make another attempt, which also proved unsuccessful.

Catherine of Siena was of those who take the Kingdom of Heaven by force. She fell ill, and turned her illness into a weapon with which to obtain her heart's desire. It is possible that this illness was the result of her adventure at Vignone—Raimondo tells us it was a painful sickness, in which her face (and no doubt the rest of her body) was covered with a disfiguring eruption. Lapa nursed her with the tenderest care, " sitting by her bedside, giving her every imaginable remedy, and seeking to console her." But Catherine only wanted one thing. Choosing a moment when her anxious mother was ready to grant her anything she wished, she begged her, with the sweetest gentleness, to make a third attempt to obtain for her the habit of the Third Order from the Mantellate. Lapa agreed to go, urged no doubt by

Catherine's firm belief that if she did not obtain the habit, God and St. Dominic, who were calling her, would take her away by death.

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unable to endure such pain. "At first she prolonged her vigils till the hour of Matins; but afterwards she overcame sleep so entirely that she only slept for a short half-hour every other day; and only allowed herself that repose when forced by physical weakness to take it." Her existence was a miracle. Medical men assured Fra Raimondo that it was inexplicable by natural means. At the age of fifteen she renounced wine entirely, and for a long time previously had only taken enough to colour the water which she drank. Meat she had long given up; the very smell of it caused her real suffering. At this time she ate only a little bread and some raw vegetables. Her body began to be weighed down with infirmities and she was often seriously ill; still her physical strength does not on the whole seem to have diminished. During the whole time that Raimondo "had the privilege of witnessing her life, she took no food and no drink that was capable of sustaining her; and this deprivation she supported joyously even when suffering and undergoing extraordinary fatigue." He adds one interesting note: "We must beware of supposing that this was the usual consequence of a certain diet and graduated abstinence. It is evident that her strength was maintained by the ardour of her soul; for when the spirit is stronger than the body, and is satiated with heavenly food, the flesh easily endures the torment of hunger." He compares her miraculous existence to that of the Desert Fathers, remarking that all these "lived in the peace of solitude and the protecting shade of some monastery," while Catherine "was neither in a convent nor in the wild, but in the bosom of her family, without spiritual direction, and surrounded by obstacles of every sort. Yet she attained a degree of abstinence greater than that of any other Saint." He alludes to the fast of Moses, of St. John the Baptist, of St. Mary Magdalene, and writing after Catherine's death, concludes from this examination: "*Non est inventus similis illae.*"

Lapa's distress at these unimaginable austerities was excessive. "A true daughter of Eve," she attempted, in intense but mistaken natural love for her child, to put an end to them. She determined that Catherine should

share her own bed. Here at least would be fine linen and warm coverings. If she could not oblige her child to eat, she would at any rate now get a few hours' comfortable rest. Lapa would enter Catherine's cell, and finding her lying on her plank bed, would "conduct her forcibly" to her own room and oblige the girl to lie down. Falling on her knees before her mother, Catherine would "soften her by words full of humility and sweetness," promising to do as she wished. Then, lying down by her side she would meditate and pray fervently until her mother fell asleep, when Catherine would rise softly and return to her devotions until "Satan, provoked by her constancy, would awaken Lapa." Then Catherine thought out a plan of satisfying both herself and her mother. She managed to slide "one or two planks under the sheets in the place she was to occupy," but Lapa speedily discovered this, and, finding that her endeavours were vain, gave them up in despair, unwillingly permitting her daughter "to follow the Divine inspiration." All this time the hope of entering the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic had been strong in Catherine's heart. Continually she spoke of it to her parents, and it is easy to imagine how Lapa lamented to her husband over this entirely incomprehensible desire. But Giacomo, true to his promise, would not interfere. Catherine applied directly to the Sisters of Penance, but apparently without obtaining an answer. Lapa dared not forbid her daughter to think any more of the matter. She endeavoured to divert Catherine's mind by proposing that they should both pay a visit, as is customary with Italians from time to time, to the public Baths, probably those of Vignone on the river Orcia, a little distance to the south of Siena; thus "becoming, without precisely knowing it, the accomplice of Satan."

Catherine accompanied her mother, but when they arrived she begged that they might enter the baths alone, and when Lapa unsuspectingly agreed Catherine approached that end of the bath where the sulphurous waters poured in heated to boiling point. She suffered intense pain—so great that Fra Raimondo, when informed of the occurrence years later by Lapa, asked

Catherine how she could support such torture and live? To this she answered, "with the simplicity of a dove," that she had, whilst standing there in the scalding water, thought much on the pains of Purgatory and Hell, beseeching her Creator whom she had so often offended, to accept for the torments she had deserved those she was then enduring, which indeed were more severe than any she had previously inflicted on herself. And heavenly consolation overflowed her soul until she became unconscious of her physical pain.

We cannot wonder that Lapa, on their return to Siena from this expedition, so fruitless as regards her own hopes, made a fresh attempt to turn Catherine from austerities which in her mother's opinion were likely to put an end to her life. But Catherine's only reply was to beg her to request the Mantellate, as the Sisters of Penance were called, to bestow on her the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic. Reluctantly Lapa went on this errand, but the Sisters refused, saying it was not their custom to receive young girls, but only widows of mature age who had consecrated themselves to God; and that this was necessary, as they kept no enclosure, but each Sister lived according to her Rule in her own home. Lapa was of course delighted, but Catherine prevailed upon her to make another attempt, which also proved unsuccessful.

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Had it been entirely white or entirely black the inner meaning would have been incomplete." Catherine was the first unmarried girl ever received into the ranks of the Sisters of Penance in Siena, but by no means the last, for many followed her example, beginning with her own friends. "Had the Sisters reflected more seriously," concludes Fra Raimondo, "they would not, I think, have refused her request; for she was more worthy than they to wear a habit given to the Church to symbolize innocence."

The devil made a final attempt to turn Catherine from her holy purpose. A few days before her clothing, about sunset—an hour at which she seems to have been peculiarly susceptible to supernatural influences—she was in her cell praying when Satan appeared before her, in the form of an apparition not intended to terrify, but to please and soothe her. He displayed before her many beautiful and rich dresses and embroidered lengths of costly silks. Realizing that this was an old temptation renewed at this solemn moment, Catherine drove away the Evil One with scorn. The apparition disappeared, but immediately afterwards there rose within the young girl's heart a passionate desire to go out once more into the world, to dress beautifully in the extravagant and magnificent robes worn in Siena by young married women.

Throwing herself on her knees before the crucifix, Catherine cried for help to her "Sweetest Lord," who had never failed her yet, begging for grace, not to be delivered from this trial but to overcome it. Suddenly there appeared to her another vision—the Blessed Mother radiant in light, holding towards her a garment of incomparable beauty "drawn from the wounded side of her Divine Son." With this she clothed Catherine, gently bidding her to remember that no earthly robe could be so fair as that which she now wore. And Catherine, understanding and overflowing with gratitude and love, thanked God and took courage.

NOTE.—*The Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic.* Fra Raimondo of Capua (writing little more than a century and a half after St. Dominic's death) states that the Third Order of Penance was directly derived from the "Militia of Jesus Christ," founded by the Saint towards the close of his



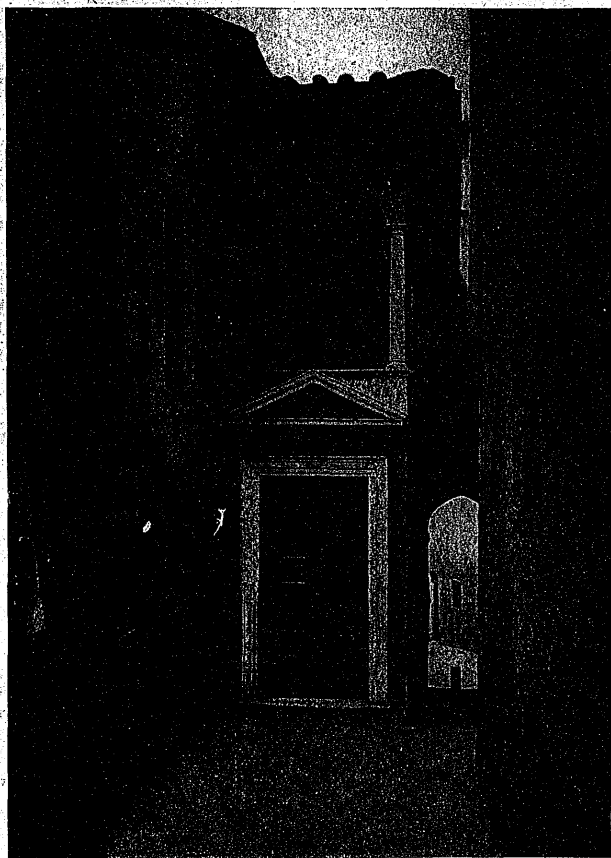


Photo. Alinari.

CASA DI SANTA CATERINA, SIENA

(3)

FOR the next three years Catherine lived entirely in retreat. It was the final stage of the Remote Preparation. She never left her father's house except to visit the Dominican church close by; she did not even leave her cell to join her family at the table. She spoke to no man, except her nearest relations, without the permission of her confessor, Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and she observed strictly the Three Vows of Religion.

These she had not pronounced at her clothing, such not being the Rule of the Mantellate; but she had made a resolution to keep them perfectly. The Vow of Chastity she had indeed already made to her Divine Bridegroom. She had also promised to obey implicitly the Father Director of the Mantellate, and their Prioress, and during her whole life she was so faithful to this engagement that, as she told Raimondo shortly before her death, she could not remember once having failed in Obedience. She also observed the Vow of Poverty perfectly. For herself she desired nothing, but her father, at this time still a wealthy man, had given Catherine permission to bestow liberal alms on the poor; and this, while she lived in his house, she took delight in doing.

She arranged her time so as to watch "while the Dominican Friars, her brothers, were sleeping; and when she heard the second call to Matins she said to our

life to defend the temporal possessions of the Church. St. Dominic prescribed to his Militia the colours of the habit of his Order; whatever the shape of the garments worn by men or women, they must be of the emblematic black and white. A certain number of Paters and Aves was also imposed, in place of the recitation of the Canonical Hours. Towards the close of the thirteenth century the Association gradually lost its military character and the members sought to honour their Holy Founder by taking the title of "Brothers of Penance of St. Dominic." After their death their widows, accustomed to the semi-religious life which they had already led with their husbands in the world, renounced all thought of remarriage and persevered in their holy practices till death. Others joined them, and the number greatly increasing, especially in Italy, a Rule was drawn up for them by a Spanish Dominican and by him committed to writing. The Third Order was officially recognized by the Friars, who realized that it supplied a certain want; and it had been honoured by several Popes, notably by John XXII at the time when Fra Raimondo wrote. Pope John XXII, in a Bull promulgated against certain other lay Congregations, formally declared that his prohibitions did not extend to the Dominican Sisters of Penance, in whose Rule nothing needed changing.

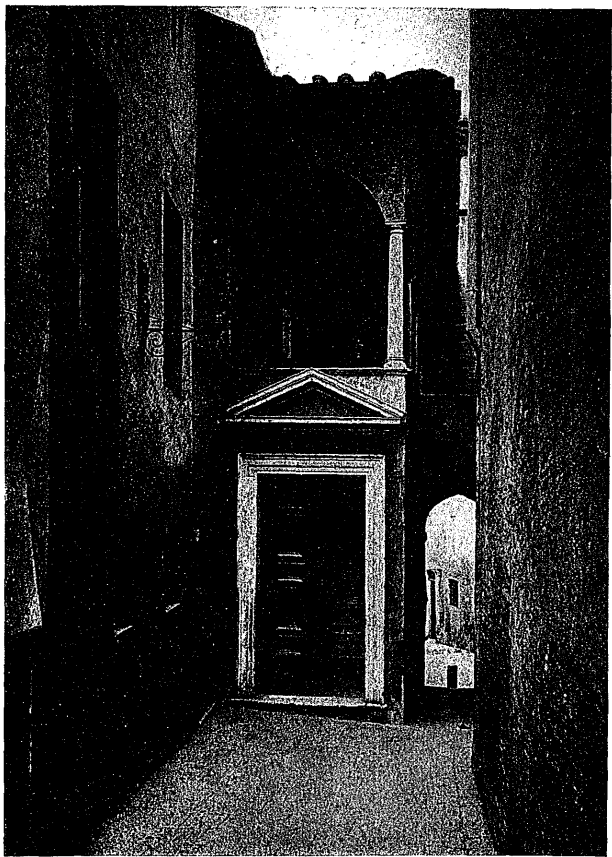


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Lord : ' Lord, my brethren who serve Thee have slept until now ; and in Thy Presence I have watched for them, praying Thee to preserve them from evil and the wiles of the enemy. Now they are arising to sing Thy praises, suffer me to rest awhile.' Then she would lie down on her planks with a log for her pillow."

Here in this quiet cell, away from the noises of the house and of the street, Catherine absorbed full draughts of that Divine Wisdom which shortly before her death her secretaries wrote down from her lips in the form of the celebrated " Dialogue " ; that most wonderful of all Revelations of Divine Love and human misery to be found outside the pages of Holy Scripture. " Her doctrine was infused, not acquired," says Pope Pius II in the Bull of Canonization of the Saint ; and, indeed, Catherine, the daughter of the humble Sienese dyer, had no means of acquiring the celestial wisdom with which her soul was so richly stored, except by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. " He whom she loved," says Fra Raimondo, " gave her as her Master neither man nor angel ; but appeared to her Himself in her cell, and taught her all that her soul needed." This fact Catherine herself revealed to her confessor when speaking of this time ; which, we cannot doubt, she must have looked back upon as the happiest of her short life. " It was our Lord Jesus Christ," she said to Raimondo, " Who, Spouse of my soul, revealed these things to me by interior and exterior visions. He spoke to me as now I speak to you."

Later on, in its chronological order (1378), we shall speak more fully of the " Dialogue " itself, but it was at this time (1364-1367) that St. Catherine in her bare and secret cell first received the marvellous Revelation. Here, as to Moses of old on Mount Sinai, the Lord " talked with her face to face, as a man talketh with his friend " ; and Catherine, like St. Paul, heard " unspeakable things which it is not possible for a man to utter." Sometimes our Lord appeared to her alone ; sometimes He was accompanied by His Blessed Mother, by St. Paul—to whom Catherine bore throughout her life the tenderest devotion—St. Mary Magdalene, St. Dominic, and other Saints, " separately or in company, according to His good pleasure."

At first these favours terrified her. She dreaded fresh illusions of the devil. But our Lord reassured her, teaching her tenderly how to distinguish between the Divine Visions and those of the enemy. "My Visions," He said, "begin in terror, and even with a certain bitterness which, little by little, changes into peace and sweetness. The delusions of Satan begin with joy, but always end by plunging the soul into trouble. Again, My Visions render the soul humble, by giving it the grace to comprehend its own unworthiness; but those of Satan excite in the soul a certain self-esteem which soon becomes vanity. Truth causes humility, while falsehood creates pride."

Catherine's spiritual vision was so intensified, so clarified by her love of God, that she gradually attained to the perfection of mystical perception. With unerring gaze fixed upon the One Supreme Good she comprehended, intuitively, absolutely, that God was the Beginning and the End, and that every event of this life was accidental and quite unimportant except in so far as it helped her to reach the One Essential. "This clear understanding of eternal values is no mere speculative gift," says a living Dominican writer: "it is practical as well, working down into the concerns of common life. St. Thomas, establishing a connection between the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the Beatitudes, points out the correspondence of Understanding with Purity of heart. . . . They act and react reciprocally, and with increasing sublimation, producing with regard to things material the detachment and utter sweetness of life . . . so characteristic of St. Catherine; with regard to things intellectual that serenity and attachment to truth which made her so keenly solicitous for the Church and the Vicar of Christ, its Head; and with regard to the affections that utter oblation and consecration to the Will of God, which in her was typified by the exchange of hearts with Christ Himself."¹ The same writer, in a most interesting study of the Saint, develops the argument of a French Dominican, that St. Catherine's "development, and, so to say, specific beauty,

¹ Fr. Finbar Ryan, O.P., article on "The 'Vision' of St. Catherine of Siena." (*Veritas*, Dublin, 1915.)

corresponds in a very special way with the Holy Spirit's gift of Understanding, and its influence on the natural capacities of her soul." As the mind of a man reaches a conclusion by a process of reasoning, so a woman's reaches the same conclusion by intuition. Of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, four—Knowledge, Wisdom, Counsel, and Understanding—are intellectual. That of Understanding alone has reference to the intuitive powers of the mind, "and goes directly, beyond appearances, to the realities beneath." While Knowledge shines forth in St. Dominic, Wisdom in St. Thomas, and Counsel in St. Antoninus, Almighty God chose a woman to personify, as a Saint of the Order, the special Gift of Understanding.¹

From this gift flowed St. Catherine's whole spiritual philosophy. She was naturally, as we have said, an optimist. "Is not sadness the worst of all the sins?" she was to write, a few years later, to Neri di Landoccio, whose supersensitive nature was too strongly tinged with melancholy. But Catherine's extreme cheerfulness was by no means merely natural. It was founded on the idea that God demands of us, not absolute, but attempted Perfection; that He does not require of the soul entirely to eradicate a single fault, but to attempt to eradicate it with all its powers. "God does not ask a perfect work, but infinite desire." Consequently, there can be no discouragement, even for those naturally pessimistic. For all God asks is that each should do his best. And as Catherine was nothing if not intensely individualistic, she was well content when, later, she saw the souls who came under her direction each finding God in his own way. The chief point was the determination of the soul to reach its goal; direction being useful merely to keep such a soul in the right direction. Every event of life was thus sacramentalized, for each was the outcome of the Will of the Divine Lover. With St. Teresa, St. Catherine could exclaim: "My God, You know everything, You can do everything—and You love me!" Did a friend fail her, or an enemy injure her, did she fail herself—apparently—in any mission of those entrusted to her by

¹ P. Gardeil, O.P., *Les Dons du St. Esprit dans les Saints Dominicains*. (Lecoffre. Paris, 1903.)

Almighty God—her serene confidence, her sunny gaiety never faltered. Her understanding leapt to the conclusion of the whole matter : “ All the way to Heaven is Heaven, for He has said, ‘ I am the Way.’ ”

From this glad optimism sprang a breadth of mind, a wide tolerance of everything but intolerance which is remarkable in a woman. She to whom was vouchsafed that terrible vision of the Church like a fair virgin whose face was marred and disfigured with the leprosy of the sins of her clergy and people, yet ventures bravely to rebuke a Pope for this same fault of intolerance. If none knew better than Catherine the dangers of laxity, in personal or ecclesiastical discipline, none were more staunchly opposed to narrowness and harshness. For intolerance was only a species of pride—the pride which does not shrink from judging, condemning, and even punishing its fellows—and this Catherine dreaded. “ The soul who wills only to follow Christ crucified,” said the Divine Teacher, “ never constitutes herself a judge even of the sins of her neighbours. From the sin she draws a deep and holy compassion which causes her to pray to Me for the sinner. Perfect humility makes her say : ‘ To-day it is thou who art in the power of evil ; to-morrow it will be I myself, if Divine Grace preserve me not.’ ”

But this mystic power of seeing good in everything, because she saw God there ; this sublime confidence in the illimitable comprehension and mercy of the Eternal Father ; this sweet humility which refrained from judging “ even the sins ” of others, were crowned and perfected by Patience. The Church, in her prayer to St. Catherine of Siena, declares her to have been adorned “ with the special privilege of patience.” And indeed, few Saints have needed it more ! Again and again in the “ Dialogue ” we come upon such passages as these : “ Love never goes alone, without her train of true and real virtues . . . and of these the principal is Patience, which is the very marrow of love. Patience is the infallible sign that a soul is in the grace of God, and that she loves Him in deed and in truth.” “ The sign that thou dost possess the virtue of Obedience is Patience,”

declares the Eternal Truth to this eager disciple: "Patience and Obedience are inseparable. He who is not patient proves by his own act that Obedience has no part in his soul." "The sap of the tree of Charity is Patience, which is the certain sign of My Presence in a soul, and of the union of that soul with Me." And again: "If thou dost desire to promote My honour in the Holy Church thou must needs love sufferings, and have a firm will to endure them with true Patience. For by that I shall know that thou . . . and My other servants truly seek My honour." Again, Obedience is inseparably united to Patience in that beautiful treatise on the former virtue, which shows how "Obedience is the key which unlocks Heaven," and how this key must never be detached from the girdle! But it is in speaking of the Gift of Tears that the Eternal Word declares that Patience is even royal. "O beloved daughter, this Patience is a Queen. Seated on the rock of strength she is ever victorious, and cannot be conquered. Nor is she seated there alone, but is accompanied by Perseverance. She is the true marrow of Love. It is Patience who proclaims without the presence of Love within; it is she who proves that the soul is clothed with the wedding-garment. If this holy robe have a rent, an imperfection, want of Patience will betray it.

"It is easy to be deceived as to all the other virtues. They may seem to be perfect, though they are not, if they have not been tested by Patience. . . . If they have not been so tested they are still imperfect; they have not been admitted to the Table of the Holy Cross, where Patience is conceived in self-knowledge and the knowledge of My goodness; where she is brought forth by holy hatred (of sin) and is anointed with true humility. This Patience never refuses the food served to her on this Table—the food of My Honour and the salvation of souls. On this she is ceaselessly nourished." The story of St. Catherine's life is the best comment on such teaching as this.

She had learnt early to use all things as a means to her end. "What can I do, what can I endure for Thee, O Lord?" she cried one day in a transport of love; and

the Eternal Word answered her: "I am He Who delighteth in few words and many deeds. This I say to make it plain that he who is content to cry to Me with his voice: 'Lord, I want to do something for Thee!' as well as he who is willing to mortify his body for Me without renouncing his own self-will is wrong in thinking this is pleasing to Me. What I desire are good works wrought with manful endurance, which is the effect of patience . . . I Who am Infinite seek good works that are infinite—that is, of infinite love. I require that works of penitence and other corporal mortifications should be treated only as means, and that they should not hold the principal place in the affections. For if they are loved above all the soul can offer Me only finite works. . . . Let the soul accomplish these corporal acts as means, and not as her principal end."

The note of joy rings clear and true throughout every passage of the spiritual teaching St. Catherine received from our Lord, and this, like a true daughter of St. Dominic, she gave forth in her turn to the souls of men. "Thy sufferings," said the Divine Master, "are a cup filled with the water of My grace, which gives life to the soul: this cup I offer to every soul who serves Me well. Thus I receive their anguish, their desires, their tears, their humble sighs and continual prayers. . . . Suffer thus manfully till death. Do not take your hand from the plough for fear of creatures, or of tribulation. Rejoice rather in tribulation. The world takes pleasure in doing you a thousand unkindnesses: let not your heart be troubled on this account, but only because these offences are done to Me. For in offending Me, they offend you, and in offending you they offend Me—I Who am become one with you." "Everything is a source of joy to the soul enlightened by Me. In whatever state that soul sees My servants, and in whatever way they serve Me, she rejoices at it." It helps us to realize the charming personality of Catherine; her transfigured, but very real humanity when we remember that she was always cheerful. True, she wept until her eyes became "fountains of waters" for the dishonour done to God by the sins of the times; by public scandals

and secret crimes—all of which, like a strange and evil odour, were manifest to her sensitized soul. But not even the crowning agony of all—the Rending of the Seamless Garment two years before her death could effectually dim the interior joy which radiated from her as a mirror reflects the light.

During these three years of silence our Lord taught His servant the inner meaning of the Three Vows she had resolved to keep. That of Poverty must always present certain difficulties to those in Catherine's position living in the world. "Those who wish to attain great perfection despise this world's goods, literally and spiritually. There are they who really observe the Counsel given and proposed by My Truth. Those who possess these things observe the Commandments and follow the Counsels in spirit only, not in reality . . . If you possess this world's goods you should do so with humility, not with pride, holding them as a thing lent, not as a thing which is your own . . . You have them only when I bestow them; you keep them only when I leave them in your possession, and I leave them and give them only when I judge it well for your salvation. Using them thus, man observes the Commandments; loving Me above all things, and his neighbour as himself. His heart is free and detached, for he only possesses and keeps these goods according to My Will . . . He who acts thus lives in common charity. But those who observe the Commandments and the Counsels not only in spirit but in reality, these are in perfect charity, observing in all simplicity the Counsel which My Truth, the Word Incarnate, declared to the young man who asked Him: 'Master, what must I do to obtain eternal life?' . . . Those who are content not to reach the heights of perfection, and who wish to retain their worldly goods, must hold them as lords, not as slaves."

Irresistibly we are reminded of the epigram of that greatest Archbishop of Florence, St. Antoninus, which the Church has crystallized for us for ever in a responsory of his office: "*Servire Deum regnare est.*" And this, after all, is the first letter of the alphabet of sanctity.

At this time Catherine still retained the habit of vocal

prayer ; though later on she was unable to repeat the first words of the Paternoster without falling into ecstasy. Having passed through the Purgative and Illuminative Ways she was now to be united to God in the highest degree of contemplation that is possible to the human soul. She still continued her regular practice of meditation upon the Life and Passion of our Lord, and she made frequent and fervent use of ejaculatory prayer. Her humility was too great to allow her to suppose that the heights of contemplation could be scaled otherwise than by the steps worn hollow by the feet of the Saints, and in this humility lay her greatest safeguard. Already had begun those ecstasies of which we shall speak more fully later on—ecstasies in which she was incapable of feeling, sight, or hearing ; on coming out of which the priests who visited her heard her speak of Divine things with the supernaturalized intelligence of a Doctor of the Church, enlightened as she was by the Heavenly Wisdom with Whom she had just been holding colloquy.

At the beginning of these three years our Lord appeared to her one day while she was in meditation, and said to her : “ Know, My daughter, what thou art, and what I am. If thou canst learn these two things thou art blessed indeed. I am He that Is. Thou art that which is not. If thy soul is deeply penetrated with this truth thou wilt never consent to transgress any one of My Commandments, and easily wilt thou acquire Grace, Truth, and Peace.” Thus had the Eternal spoken on Mount Horeb to him who was to lead God’s chosen people out of the land of bondage, when Moses asked for a sign. “ ‘ If they should say to me, what is His Name, what shall I say to them ? ’ ” And God said to Moses : “ ‘ Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel : HE WHO is hath sent me to you.’ ”¹ Meditating on this illimitable Truth, which is the groundwork of Faith, Catherine penetrated ever deeper and deeper into the unsearchable riches of the mystical Treasure of Heaven, preparing her soul to receive further revelations from her Lord. The sweetest of all was made to her in the gracious promise : “ My daughter, think on Me, and I will think on Thee.”

¹ Exodus iii. 13, 14.

Unspeakable was Catherine's joy in pondering these words, which she understood to mean that in keeping her heart fixed on God alone she need feel no anxiety as to her own future salvation, or as to any earthly thing. This virtue of Hope was the mainspring of the courage which inspired her to carry out her life's great work ; the plant which was always glowing with the fragrant blossoms of supernatural joy. "This virtue was infused into her soul by her Divine Spouse when He said to her : ' Think on Me, and I will think on thee.' "

To many of the Saints it has been granted to spend—not three years, but the whole of a long life—in such heavenly intercourse ; in the silence of the hermitage or the peace of the cloister. Catherine was not one of these. Her lot was cast in the world ; her life is inextricably woven into the history of her times. But in these three years she learnt the lessons of a lifetime. No hermit of the desert, no Carmelite or Carthusian mystic has surpassed in his supernatural knowledge of the hidden mysteries of Christ, Catherine Benincasa, the dyer's daughter of Siena, who was so soon to become one of the most important political factors of her day ; and who was to die at thirty-three, worn out and broken by her labours. For she had learned, not only to think on God, but to forget herself.

Take a nature like Catherine's, strong and tender, sensitive and logical, full of common sense, and with a decided point of humour ; temper and melt it in the fire of Divine Grace as steel is tried in the furnace ; and from it you may forge a weapon that, in God's Hand, will pierce the hearts of sinners and lay low the enemies of the Bride of Christ. It has been claimed by more than one modern writer that had St. Catherine lived a couple of centuries later, she would have been, in her burning zeal for reform, one of the most ardent followers of Martin Luther ! Such a statement is on a par with that which would place Savonarola beside that apostate monk, as one of the pioneers of the Protestant " reformation." As we follow, from stage to stage, the flame-like life of Catherine of Siena we shall better understand how impossible it would be under any circumstances whatso-

ever to imagine her anything but a Catholic, burning with passionate devotion for the Church and for the "Christ on earth," irrespective of all human opinion and of personal desires. It is true that the state of the Church in the *Quattrocento* was as bad as it could be, yet she in her supreme idealism was able to face the facts firmly. She who spoke out more strongly than even St. Antoninus and St. Bernardine against the corruptions of the Church, loved her passionately as the Bride of Christ, with a love and a hatred which no non-Catholic mind can possibly conceive. At the most appalling crisis of the Church's history we shall find her at the side of the true Pope, a harsh, forbidding man, unpopular even with his former friends; while nearly half Christendom, and—what was more important to Catherine—a very large proportion of the Dominican Order, including the Master-General, and after her day St. Vincent Ferrer himself, offered allegiance to the antipope, a charming and cultured personality, with a gift for winning hearts by tact and grace. Him Catherine did not hesitate to qualify roundly as a devil. A hundred less important examples might be given in proof of this point, but Catherine's own personality and history—like that of Savonarola—is the best refutation of such a slander. And what we seek to show unmistakably is that during this silent period of communion with God, the close of what may be called the Remote Preparation for her magnificent mission, there was built and entrenched and fortified in the young girl's soul that interior castle, "the strong Tower which is the Name of the Lord," whose foundations she had begun to lay from the first dawn of her understanding. To Catholics, who understand what this means, there is little need to prove that St. Catherine of Siena could never have been a heretic!

It was during the course of these three years that she first made the acquaintance of a young Dominican friar who was to become her lifelong friend. This was Fra Tommaso di Antonio Nacci Caffarini, who, next to Fra Raimondo himself, is her principal biographer. To him, and to Fra Tommaso della Fonte, who introduced him to the Saint, we owe the details of this period of her

life. Fra della Fonte had doubtless already spoken of him to Catherine, for before their meeting Caffarini himself relates that she had more than once sent him gifts of flowers, such as she loved to bestow on those whom she counted her friends, "in token of the Love of Christ." It is he who tells us, too, that on one of the Feasts of the Holy Cross, as Catherine was meditating upon the Sacred



Passion, our Lord suddenly appeared to her, offering her a golden cross, which He bade her take and follow Him. She obeyed, but immediately saw another, and much higher cross rising before her. On this cross our Lord placed Himself, bidding her approach with her mouth the wound in His side. Filled with ineffable joy at the sacred contact, Catherine felt herself taken by the hand and lifted up until "her face rested upon the Face of her Beloved." Then our Lord taught her that these three acts typified

the three degrees of contemplation, in the highest of which the soul attains to perfect peace and tranquillity in the embrace of God, as it is written in Holy Scripture : " Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."

It was at this time that Catherine learnt to read. " She told me herself," says Fra Raimondo, " that having resolved to learn to read so as to recite the Hours and follow the Offices, she had studied the alphabet with one of her companions. But having spent several weeks in vain over this labour it occurred to her to obtain from Heaven the grace of wasting no more time. One morning while praying, she said to Almighty God : ' Lord, if it be agreeable to Thee that I should know how to read, in order to be able to recite the Divine Office and to sing Thy praises, I pray Thee to teach me what I cannot learn alone. If not, Thy Will be done, and I will remain ignorant without murmuring, employing joyfully in meditation the time that I should give to reading.' Before she had finished her prayer the Lord taught her so well that on rising from her knees she was able to read any kind of manuscript as rapidly and perfectly as the most highly-educated person. What chiefly astonished me was that though she read easily she was unable to spell the words when asked to do so ; as she scarcely knew her letters. Catherine at once procured a breviary, and read all the Psalms and Canonical Hours. She was particularly fond of the verse and response : *Deus, in adjutorium meum intende : Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina*, which she translated, and continually repeated. She soon made such progress in contemplation that she gradually omitted her vocal prayers."

Perhaps the greatest favour of all shown to her by her Divine Lord was this—that He recited the Psalter with her in her cell, " just as two Religious may recite their office together." For such honour as this the foundation of humility needed indeed to be well and truly laid.

But Catherine's cell had other visitants. From the beginning of her retreat the devil had not ceased to tempt her, more especially by evil dreams and visions and subtle spiritual temptations, which she repelled valiantly in the Name of God, and against which she multiplied

the disciplines which she already took three times a day, besides entirely depriving herself for a time of sleep. She was haunted by demons who assumed the guise of wise and kindly people visiting her to give her advice, imploring her to cease tormenting herself, speaking to her of the human happiness to be found in a perfect marriage. To all their arguments the girl only replied : " I trust in



the Arm of the Lord, not in my own " ; but in her heart she prayed constantly and fervently. Then the devil, furious, devised new attacks. Evil spirits, impure and hideous in form, " pursued her about her cell with screams," inviting her by suggestions and acts to become partaker of their abominations. This torture lasted for several days, in spite of her increased prayers and penitence. So infested was her cell with the powers of darkness that she left it, and spent as much time as possible in the

Dominican Church close by, where they tormented her less.

One day on returning to her cell "a ray of the Holy Spirit illumined her soul," and she remembered she had earnestly begged the gift of fortitude from God. Then she took courage, resolving to bear the temptation as long as it should please her Lord. It was the crisis. At this moment a demon "more malicious than the others," threatened to destroy her if she did not obey their frightful suggestions. Then Catherine made this memorable answer: "I have chosen suffering for my consolation. It will not be difficult, but rather joyful to undergo such torments and even greater ones for the Love of Christ Jesus, and for as long time as His Majesty wills."

Instantly the devils fled, howling with rage and shame, while a heavenly light flooded her cell, in the midst of which she beheld our Lord hanging on the Cross as on Calvary. He called her by name. "Catherine, My daughter, consider how I have suffered for thee, and thou wilt never find it hard to suffer for Me." Then the Vision changed, and in the form in which He generally appeared to her, our Lord began to speak of the victory which she had gained in His Name.

But Catherine's heart was wrung with pain. "O Lord," she cried, "where wast Thou when my heart was so tormented?" Her Divine Lover replied that He had been in the midst of her heart; and to her further question asked if the temptations had given her pleasure or pain? He told her that she had suffered because He was hidden there, and His Sacred Presence had rendered them insupportable. "I acted in thy soul, I defended thee against the enemy . . . therefore, beloved daughter, it is not by thy virtue but by Mine that thou hast so generously combatted . . . Henceforth I will visit thee more often, and more familiarly than before."

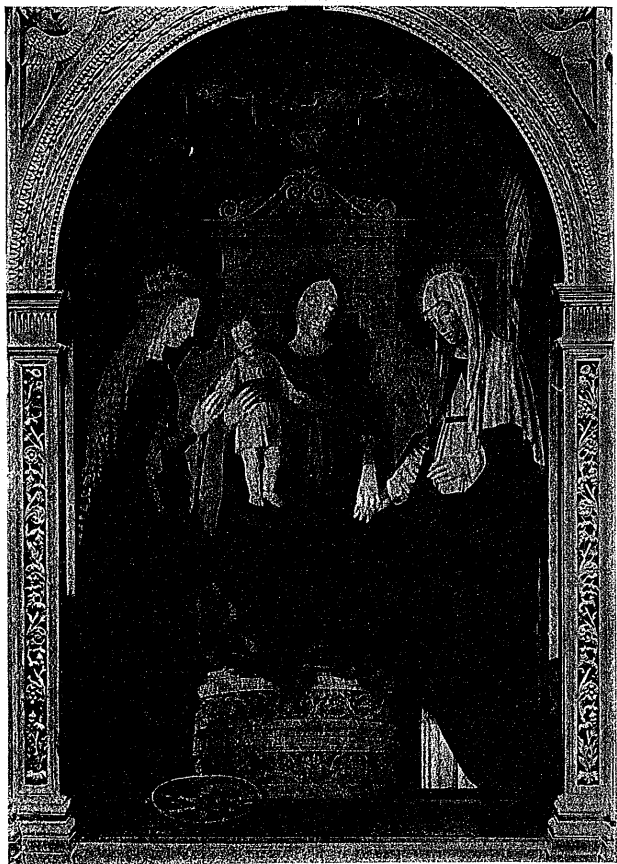
Catherine's whole heart was filled with joy at the tender words: "Catherine, My daughter." That she might be constantly reminded of them she begged her confessor to address her thus "in order to revive in her soul their ineffable sweetness." Henceforth she "flew rather than walked" along the path to perfection. Our

Blessed Lord one day made her this gracious promise: "I will espouse thee unto Me in faith." In 1367—on Shrove Tuesday—while all Siena was celebrating the last day of carnival with mediæval extravagance, she was in her cell offering reparation to the best of her power for the sins that were being committed that day in the city, when in her heart she heard the voice of her Lord, Who said: "Because thou hast shunned the forbidden pleasures of the world, and fixed thy heart on Me alone, I will celebrate a feast here with thee, while those that dwell in this house are banqueting and revelling; and I will espouse thee to Me in faith with joy and majesty, according to My promise."

Then appeared before Catherine's happy eyes the Holy Mother of God, accompanied by St. Dominic and the other Saints who had so often visited her; amongst them the Psalmist of Israel, "who drew from his harp sounds of heavenly sweetness." Approaching Catherine, our Lady took her hand within her own, and presenting her to her Divine Son, prayed Him to fulfil His promise. "To which He consented with a very sweet and lovely countenance, and taking out a ring that was set about with four precious pearls, and in the midst a marvellous great diamond, He put the same upon a finger of her right hand, saying thus: 'Behold, I have espoused thee to Me in Faith, thy Creator and Redeemer; and this Faith shall continue evermore, unchanged, until the time come of a blissful consummation in Heaven. Now then act courageously; thou art armed with Faith, and shalt triumph over thine enemies.'"

The mystic ring remained on Catherine's finger, visible to herself, but invisible to others. Never, as she declared to Fra Raimondo, was she weary of admiring it. The Spouse of Christ was now ready to follow her Divine Bridegroom whithersoever He should call her. The second stage of her earthly pilgrimage was now about to begin.





THE MYSTICAL ESPOUSALS OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA
The figure on the left is that of St. Catherine of Alexandria [Borgnone.]

CHAPTER II

THE IMMEDIATE PREPARATION

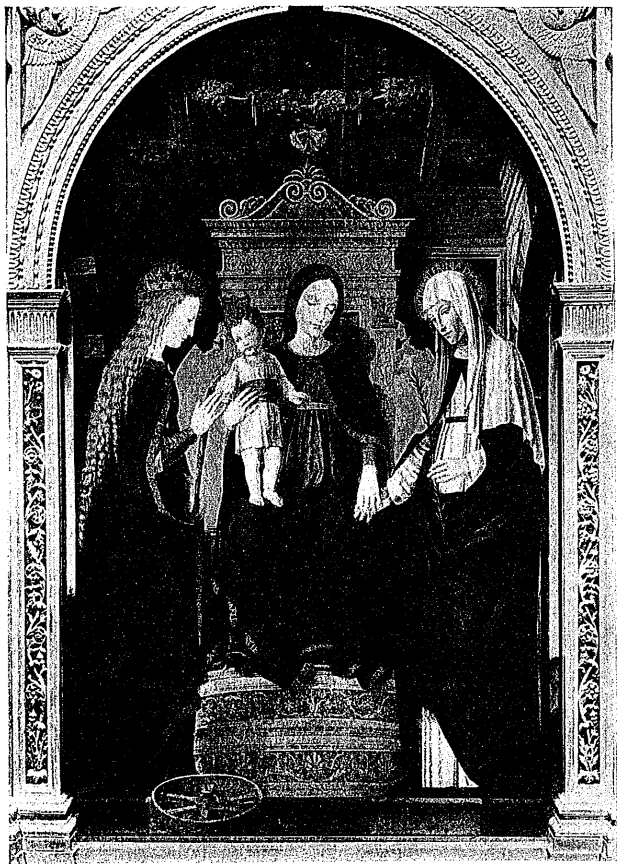
(1367-1374)

(I)

THE time had come for the Spouse of Christ to leave her solitude, and serve her Master in the world. The first stage of her training was over, and the active preparation was now about to begin. The sorrows of her city and country "rang like a trumpet in her ears and gave her no rest." But instead of driving her back into her lonely cell "they aroused her to wrestle with them, to the end of making the earth she lived in a more godly habitation . . . Violence, blasphemy, greed, and oppression met the young girl at every turn, until her heart swelled with the sorrows of her race . . . 'I die and cannot die,' was the agonized cry she raised again and again. But in spite of her anguish she sought the burden of the world, courageously resolved to do her part to realize a nobler brotherhood of man."¹ Yet to Catherine, "irresistibly drawn to the world by the passion of service," fresh from the three years of solitary communion with the Most High, all the sins of the world were, as she herself declares: "but a drop of vinegar in the boundless ocean of God's Love."

After her mystic espousals our Lord introduced her to the Active Life. She was to begin with her own family. "Go quickly," He would say, "it is the hour of supper. Take thy place with thy parents at table, and then return to Me." In vain she pleaded her inability to swallow or retain any kind of solid food. Her Master would bid her do this thing from charity and humility, promising to accompany and remain with her. Then she would prostrate herself, making the *Venia*, and arise to do His bidding. Of her difficulty as to eating we shall speak

¹ F. Schevill, *Siena*, pp. 261-2. (Chapman & Hall, 1909.)



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further later. Curiously enough, no practice of Catherine's seems to have caused greater scandal than this, of her miraculous abstinence from food.

For the next seven years we must think of her, having left as a girl of twenty, not indeed her beloved cell, but her retreat, mingling once more with her family, and with the true Dominican spirit, beginning to give forth to the world—at first at home, but soon throughout her native city—the fruits of her contemplation. She who, like Peter, would if she had followed her own will, have remained for ever on the Mount of Transfiguration, found, like the Apostle, the suffering, dying world groaning at the foot of the mountain.

It is difficult to realize that the Siena of St. Catherine's day was a larger town than either London or Paris in the *Quattrocento*. It was indeed one of the largest and most important cities of Western Europe. In the previous century, "side by side of the gloomy, crenellated, fortress-like palaces of the old nobility, there began to grow up the splendid houses of the wealthy merchants . . . But there yet remained a large number of wooden houses, particularly in the poorer parts of the town."¹ Wooden *loggiati*, or balconies, overhung the crooked, narrow, winding streets to a third of their width. It is impossible to write of the jewel which Siena then contained without describing its setting. We cannot here trace the history of the hill-throned rival of Florence in her lovely valley, Florence the jealous and perpetual enemy; but so little has Siena changed externally from the days of her mediæval pomp and power that it is easy to visualize the Siena of St. Catherine's day as we climb the Via Francigena towards the Porta Romana, and look upwards. "Siena, set so firmly on her triune hill, towers there even to-day with a gesture of joy, radiant and beautiful, caught about by her vineyards as with a kirtle of green, girdled with silver and gold—the silver of her olives mixed with the gold of her corn."

Realizing Catherine's intense love for her native city, from which indeed it is impossible to dissociate her fragrant memory, it is necessary to picture it clearly if

¹ Langton Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 118, 119, *q.v.*

we would faithfully follow the slender figure in its white habit and patched mantle, threading the narrow streets—choked as they were in the days of the plague, with dead and dying—entering churches, palaces, prisons, pest-houses, and the welcoming homes of her many friends. “There is nothing in the world quite like Siena,” says the modern writer who has understood better than any other the mediæval spirit still living in the marred and broken beauty of present-day Italy—“there is no other place that has just her gift of expression, her quality of joy, of passion, of sheer loveliness.”¹ The city climbs upwards, now as then “built as it were in one piece, crowding round the Cathedral, and sharply divided from the country which the walls scarcely thrust back . . . Her beautiful mediæval streets are still lined with palaces, splendid and severe; not separated from the lesser houses, but joined to them with only here and there an opening through which you see a vista of steep, lofty, narrow way under an arch, perhaps, that leads suddenly and swiftly down into the valley, or winds slowly uphill . . . And these streets that tunnel and wind and climb so narrowly and steeply through the city are at once lively and quiet—lively by reason of the children who play in them, the women who gossip at their shadowy doorways, the pedlars and hawkers who cry their wares between these ancient, echoing walls. The only traffic that passes up and down these paved, narrow, twisting, climbing ways is the *barrocci* of the charcoal merchants, the asses of the woodmen, laden with wood from the mountains, or the great wagons drawn by drowsy white oxen, whose horns almost touch the houses on either side the narrow ways as they drag slowly home the burden of wine from the vineyard . . . And in and out . . . now hidden by a tower or shut out by a high roof, the sun looks down, and the shadows advance and recede, and over all, between the tall houses, is a strip of soft blue sky.”²

In such a narrow street as has just been described—in words which we have preferred to any of our own—stood the house of Giacomo Benincasa, whose earthly course was nearly run when Catherine’s public mission was

¹ Edward Hutton, *Siena and Modern Tuscany*, p. 68, q.v. ² *Ibid.*

beginning. Here may still be seen her cell—very much as she left it—the room which by special permission from the Pope she was allowed to convert into a chapel, later in her life, that she might hear mass there, and not “disturb” or scandalize the pious worshippers at San Domenico by her ecstasies. The house is full of relics and sweet with memories of the Saint, but it has been too often described in detail for it to be necessary to do so again here. One of Catherine’s first acts was to seek her father, and, remembering her Vow of Poverty, ask him if she might deduct from the wealth which God gave him, a certain fixed amount for the poor. Not only did the good man consent cheerfully, but he announced the fact to the whole family. “Let none,” he said, “prevent my dear daughter from bestowing alms. I grant her full permission to dispense, if she will, all that is in the house”—a permission of which Catherine was not slow to avail herself. Very early in the morning she would rise to carry, like St. Nicholas, secret gifts of corn, wine, oil, and other food to the houses of God’s poor. Miraculously, silently, the locked doors would open before her; and having laid down her burden she would close them softly, and steal gently away. On one occasion, having heard of a case of desperate want when she was so feeble and suffering she could not rise from her bed, she spent the whole night begging for strength to carry out her charitable purpose. Rising before daylight she collected everything she could find, bringing food, wine, and flour back to her cell. So weak was she that it seemed impossible to her to go a step further. Yet, by God’s help, she was enabled to carry the heavy load to the starving widow’s door.

It must be confessed that to the well-meaning Lapa—an excellent housewife, like so many Tuscan women; entirely without imagination, and full of the most practical common sense—these things were little short of maddening. “The devil,” says Fra Raimondo, “excited her mother Lapa against her, even to rage.” Catherine, indeed, suffered excessively from the criticisms of her family—which, from their point of view, can scarcely be wondered at! “They secretly accused her; calumniated her

under an appearance of zeal," and endeavoured to force her confessor, whom they knew she dared not disobey, to dissuade her from practices which caused them the greatest inconvenience. Convinced that she was following God's Will, Catherine yet could not become a cause of scandal by disobeying Fra Tommaso; and could only pray with tears that what was so clear to herself might become luminous to him also. Without giving up a single practice of devotion she devoted herself to works of charity and humility at home—cooking, sweeping, washing dishes and clothes, often at night while all the others were asleep. Lapa's servant fell ill, and Catherine not only supplied her place, but waited upon the sick woman, and nursed her tenderly. Her ecstasies now increased in number and length. As the thought of Christ Jesus penetrated her soul life seemed to recede from her body, leaving it cold and stiff like a statue. Often it was raised from the ground, to the astonishment of her family: "her body pursuing her soul, in order to show the power of the Spirit which attracted her." On coming out of these ecstasies she suffered intense pain if anyone had attempted to move her limbs, which were stiff and rigid as marble while she was unconscious. On one occasion Lapa, who understood none of these things, and who appears to have set down the phenomenon as part of the morbid fancy of a foolish girl, nearly killed her daughter, as Catherine confessed later, by attempting to make her hold up her head, and using much force in the process. "A little more, and my neck would have been broken," said Catherine, who suffered acutely from the pain for many days.

Her dearest friend was Lisa, her brother Bartolo's wife, the cousin of St. John Colombini, founder of the Gesuati, himself a Sienese. Lisa's children were Catherine's joy and delight; she loved to have them with her, and "never wearied of caressing them." Many of these children died in early youth—several, like Catherine's own sister Lisa, in the plague of 1374—but two lived to become Religious in the famous Dominican monastery of Montepulciano, some ten miles from Siena, already celebrated as the home of St. Agnes. Lisa was always on the watch to save

Catherine from trouble which might lead to a scolding ! Having gone into the kitchen one day, and begun to turn the spit, Catherine fell into an ecstasy, and Lisa quietly took her place, completing the preparations for supper, and serving it, after which she put her children to bed, and returned to the kitchen. She was horrified to find that Catherine had fallen forward across the hot embers,



and rushed to her, crying : “Alas, Catherine is all burnt !” But when she was drawn away it was found that not only had she received no injury, but that her clothes were not burned, nor had the smell of fire passed upon her. Nor was this the only miracle in which it was proved to the amazement of all beholders, that the element of fire had no power against the Spouse of Christ.

Besides Catherine’s brothers and their families, and the various relations who appear to have resided at the Fulonica, the dyer’s apprentices also lived with their master,

according to custom. Very often, too, visitors were present at Lapa's hospitable board, at which certain Friars from San Domenico occasionally appeared, and from their testimony we have much evidence as to Catherine's miraculous abstinence from food. One of these Friars, introduced like Caffarini, by Fra Tommaso della Fonte, was to become another of the Saint's most faithful friends. This was Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico, who probably met her for the first time in 1368, and who was continually in touch with Catherine till her death. His deposition is one of the most valuable in the *Processus* of Venice. He was at this time very young, being still a novice, and not yet a priest, and he bears witness to Catherine which reminds us strikingly of that of the young French knights who were the close and constant companions of Blessed Jeanne d'Arc. Though Catherine, too, was a mere girl, never on any occasion of their meeting, warm as his affection was for her, did she arouse within him any feeling which he would be ashamed to avow, or which could make him resolve to avoid her. So entirely had the supernatural within her already triumphed over the natural; the spirit over the flesh.

Other visitors, many of them Friars, came, sometimes from long distances, to see the *Ecstatica*, whose fame was already beginning to spread. Such an one was Fra Niccolo, a Dominican from Pisa, who came to Siena on the plea of business, but in reality to see Catherine. Him, at his pressing request, Fra Tommaso accompanied to her cell, where they found her in ecstasy, "having the appearance of a statue rather than a woman." As they gazed they beheld her gently raised into the air, while broken exclamations of love and resignation to the Divine Will fell from her lips. Reverently, Fra Niccolo touched her with one of his fingers, the fragrance of which delighted him for hours afterwards, for he understood what had caused it.

The Saint was one day praying in San Domenico when a beggar came to her, asking alms for the love of God. She had nothing with her, and asked him to return home in her company, when she would give him all she had. But he refused, begging for something at once. "It is

impossible for me to wait," he urged. On the Rosary she wore hung a little silver cross. Catherine broke the cord, and handed the cross to the beggar, who accepted it and went away. That night, while she was praying, our Lord appeared to her, "holding in His Hand the little silver cross, all enriched with precious jewels," and said: "Daughter, dost thou recognize this cross?" "Yes,



but it was not so beautiful when it belonged to me," she replied. Then our Lord said: "Yesterday thy heart gave it Me, an offering of love. These stones represent My love. I promise thee now that on the Day of Judgment I will return thee this cross as it is now, so that it may become thy glory. And at that solemn moment when I shall manifest the justice and mercy of My Father I will not conceal it, and will never permit what thou hast done to be forgotten."

Another very similar, and even more beautiful story is told of a beggar to whom the Saint gave a warm garment of her own, and other clothes from the household stores, and who would not even then be satisfied, begging for raiment for a friend of his. Seeing at last that his request was in vain he turned away, saying : " Farewell, I see you have given me all that you can." And that night, after beholding the garments she had given, rich with embroidery of jewels and precious stones in her Master's Hands, Catherine was herself clothed by Our Divine Lord with a mystic garment " from His own Body," which preserved her henceforth from cold in winter and from heat in summer, invisible to men but perceptible to herself. " From the Wound in His Side He drew a vestment dyed in His precious Blood, radiant with light, which He put upon her with His own Hands, saying : ' I clothe thee with this garment for the time thou shalt live on earth, as a symbol and pledge of the garment of immortality with which I will clothe thee in Heaven.' "

It is impossible to dwell at any length on the long list of works of mercy performed by St. Catherine at this time ; or on the supernatural favours recorded by her Confessor and friends.¹ On at least two occasions she miraculously replenished a cask of wine in the cellar which had been reserved for family use. Fra Raimondo tells us that for three months the household was supplied from it, though Catherine had drawn from it daily supplies for her poor for a long time previously, as well as while her family were drinking the wine. It was not until the vintage, when the cask was wanted for new wine, that the flow suddenly stopped, and the hogshead, from which a large vessel of strong clear wine had been drawn only the day before, was found to be empty " and so dry, that it seemed an impossibility that any liquid at all could have been drawn from it for a long time." This miracle was attested by the entire household. Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico tells us that another time, when a wine-cask had become unexpectedly empty owing to Catherine's lavish charities, a great tumult arose in the house, and even her father was

¹ The reader is referred to Miss Drane's admirable *Life of the Saint* (Burns & Oates), where they will be found treated in detail.

vexed and annoyed. She spoke gently and affectionately to him, promising to go down and draw wine for him herself. She made the sign of the Cross over the cask, and at her prayer wine flowed from the empty cask abundantly.

Several stories are related in full, by one or another of her biographers, concerning the Saint's beautiful charity to the sick. The more unattractive the case, the more devoted was Catherine in her service. A leprous woman



named Cecca, who was sick in the great hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, became so terribly diseased that it was proposed to remove her outside the city. Catherine promised, if she was allowed to remain, that she would nurse the sick woman entirely herself, and embracing her tenderly, consoled her with cheerful words of encouragement. But after Cecca had received Catherine's ministrations for a long time the girl's very meekness and sweetness seemed to bring out all the evil in the woman's disposition.

She became unbearably insolent, mocking Catherine in a detestable way if she was late in coming to her after hearing Mass at San Domenico, and pretending to believe she stayed to gossip with the Friars. Catherine received it all without a murmur, and humbly apologized for her delay. But the matter became known, and Lapa's anger waxed hot. She implored her daughter to leave Cecca to her fate, declaring that she herself would take the leprosy if she continued to serve her. But Catherine refused. Then, to test her courage, her hands, which were slender and lovely, became covered with the terrible disease. She paid no attention to it, and soon Cecca died in her arms, in a physical state too terrible to describe. The Saint prepared the body for the grave, caused the last prayers to be said over it, and finally—everyone else having fled—buried it with her own hands, which, as soon as this last act of charity was ended, became white and fair, and more beautiful than ever before, continuing so throughout her life.

A very similar case was that of Palmerina, a rich widow who had entered the Third Order of Penance from the highest motives, but who had become secretly jealous of Catherine. From jealousy she proceeded to open enmity, speaking cruelly against the young girl, inventing scandalous tales about her, and generally behaving in an extremely disedifying manner. No Saint has suffered more from gossip—if we may be allowed the expression—than St. Catherine of Siena. We do not refer here to terrible accusations and apparently irrefutable slanders, such as that brought against St. Peter of Verona, but simply to the contemptible tattle of jealous tongues—not of women alone, but even of men. Her very manner of life brought it upon her. Few of those who strive in some degree to follow in St. Catherine's footsteps are free from this annoyance, but few meet it as triumphantly as she did. In the case of Palmerina her revenge was to offer to tend the woman when she fell sick, as she did about this time. Repulsed with scorn and driven from the house, Catherine betook herself to prayer. But Palmerina, in the full flush of her anger, became rapidly worse, and suddenly found herself face to face with death. The news was brought to

Catherine, who in her cell, shut up alone with her Lord, wrestled with Him for the soul of the woman which she knew was about to pass away. "Suffer not this soul made in Thy image to perish on my account!" she pleaded, and her prayer was heard. After an agony of three days and three nights Palmerina recovered sufficiently to repent heartily of her sin—as Catherine learnt by revelation—and to receive the last Sacraments with the deepest contrition.

It was then that our Lord revealed to His Spouse the transcendent beauty of a ransomed soul—the beauty which had filled Him with such love and pity that for the salvation of souls He became Incarnate. Catherine, filled with rapture, prayed fervently that she might henceforth have the favour of beholding the souls of men—a favour which was granted to her, so that from this day she saw, in all their beauty or cruel deformity, the souls of all whom she met even more clearly than their bodies. "She saw souls as we see faces," wrote Stefano Maconi, her dearest "son." Fra Raimondo relates this fact to explain why Catherine often allowed people to do reverence to her, and kiss her hand. He tells us he rebuked her for it in private one day, when she humbly answered that as God was her witness she scarcely perceived the actions of those about her; and to his further question: "Do you perceive their souls?" she related the foregoing history, adding: "O Father, could you see for one instant the beauty of a rational soul, you would sacrifice your life a hundred times over, if necessary, for its salvation."

A very different, but charming story is related of the Saint about this time. She discovered that a man who had voluntarily abandoned great riches for the love of God was dying of hunger. She hastened to fill with eggs a large linen pocket which she wore under her habit, and set off to his abode. On her way she entered a church, and there, falling into ecstasy, became insensible and fell over on her side so heavily that her copper thimble, which was also in the pocket, was broken into three pieces. She remained in this position for several hours, and when she returned to her senses she found indeed her thimble broken, but the eggs, on which her full weight had rested, were all whole and sound.

There was at this time in Siena a certain celebrated Friar Minor named Fra Lazzarino, who was lecturer at the monastery of San Francesco. He intensely disapproved of Catherine's method of life, and was actually hostile to her. Indeed, Fra Raimondo, when he first met the Saint in 1373, was to experience a certain feeling of distrust. "I had heard so many marvellous things of her," he tells us, "that I hesitated to believe them . . . I sought in all possible ways to discover some means to assure myself whether these phenomena came from God . . . whether they were true or false. I have found many deluded souls, especially among women, whose heads are easily turned, and who are thus exposed to the temptations of Satan." Fra Lazzarino had this suspicion in a much stronger form. He had openly spoken against Catherine, and now sought to visit her, prompted by the desire to find in her words and actions fresh material for condemnation. He asked Fra Bartolommeo to accompany him, and the Dominican consented, believing, he says, that Lazzarino would repent of his conduct. When they entered Catherine's cell, the Franciscan seated himself upon a chest, the Saint sitting on the floor at his feet, and Fra Bartolommeo standing. Some ordinary conversation followed between Lazzarino and the young girl, and soon the former excused himself, promising to return at a more suitable hour, as it was then late. As he rose, Catherine knelt and asked his blessing, and when she had received it, for his prayers. Then Fra Lazzarino, "more from politeness than devotion," asked her to pray for him, which she gladly promised to do. He left, "thinking that there was good in Catherine, but that she by no means deserved her great reputation."

That night, when Fra Lazzarino rose to study the lecture he was to deliver next day, he found himself in tears, which flowed more copiously the more he tried to check them. In the morning he found himself unable to address his students—he could only weep, and he was indignant with himself for what he considered an unmanly weakness. In vain he tried to account for it. He wept all day, until, towards evening, quite exhausted, he fell asleep. He woke, still weeping, and then began to reflect

if he had not perhaps committed some grievous fault, begging Almighty God, if this were so, to show it to him. While examining his conscience he heard an interior voice say : " Do you forget so quickly that yesterday you judged My servant Catherine in a spirit of pride, and asked her to pray for you through politeness ? " Then Fra Lazzarino understood, and repenting bitterly, he hastened at dawn to Catherine's cell, and when she opened the door—knowing well what God had wrought in his soul, the Franciscan prostrated himself before the woman he had despised. Catherine begged him to rise, prostrating also, and in the long conversation which followed Lazzarino begged her to " condescend to direct him in the way of salvation." Catherine told him that for him this consisted in poverty, and the humble following of his Holy Father St. Francis—advice which Fra Lazzarino immediately carried out, selling his books and all his possessions, " becoming truly poor, and a humble follower of the Blessed Redeemer."

In the year 1368 Giacomo Benincasa passed away. For several years the tie of tender affection that bound father and daughter had been growing stronger. He seems to have been the only one of Catherine's family in the least capable of comprehending her ; and without his generous, quiet protection her home life would have been much harder than it actually was. When his last illness came upon him his beloved daughter earnestly besought our Lord to spare her father's life ; but it was revealed to her that her request was in vain. And indeed she found him in such excellent dispositions for death that she could feel no anxiety on his account, though one thing greatly troubled her : she could not bear to think of his suffering in Purgatory, and she prayed that in the hour of death his soul might pass direct to Heaven. This again was denied her. Our Lord revealed to her that though Giacomo had led an excellent life, and fulfilled acceptably the duties of his condition, and in particular had gained much merit by his conduct towards herself, yet the Divine Justice required that his earthly life must be purified " so as by fire." Then Catherine implored that Giacomo might not die until his soul was perfectly purified and fitted for Heaven.

This amazing dialogue took place while her father was in his last agony, and so intense was the force of Catherine's prayer that his soul was unable to depart "so long as the conflict lasted" between his daughter and his Lord. Finally Catherine offered to bear any pain Almighty God might send her, to satisfy His Justice, if He would accept this oblation instead of allowing her father to suffer. This our Divine Lord permitted, revealing to her that all her life long she would be subject to a physical pain, which He would send her. Catherine thanked Him with happy tears, and hurrying to her father's bedside was just in time to receive his parting sigh, and "to give him the assurance of his eternal salvation from the mouth of God Himself." At the moment when Giacomo's spirit quitted his body Catherine felt a sudden sharp pain in her side, which she endured to the day of her death, in silence, but with great joy, in love and gratitude to her earthly, as well as to her Heavenly, Father. This took place on August 22nd, 1368, when Catherine was in her twenty-second year.

After Giacomo's death Monna Lapa fell seriously ill, and seems to have remained so for two years, for the following tremendous occurrence took place in October, 1370. Simple and kind as she was, says Fra Raimondo, "she was not desirous of invisible things, and always had a great terror of death." Her condition, after many months of what seems to have been a wasting disease, originally caused by her grief at the loss of her excellent husband, became very serious. Catherine learnt from her Master that if her mother died then she would be saved, and would avoid many trials which would overtake her if she lived. She begged Lapa to resign herself to die, but the poor woman, quite terrified at the prospect, besought her to implore our Lord to cure her "and not to mention death." Catherine, however, prayed that her mother might not die until she was completely resigned to the Divine Will, and Lapa lingered on in a critical state. Our Lord bade Catherine tell her mother that if she recovered the day would come when she would ardently desire death, and not be able to obtain it; and Raimondo testifies that this warning indeed was fulfilled, for Lapa lived to eighty-nine, and while bemoaning the death of many

of her children and grandchildren, was wont to complain that God had "riveted her soul to her body."

Suddenly, while Catherine was praying for her, Lapa actually died. Two Sienese ladies, of whom one was a Mantellata, and Lisa, Lapa's daughter-in-law, were present at her bedside, and seeing that she had indeed passed away, would have begun to prepare the body for burial had they not waited for Catherine to finish her prayer. They heard the Saint remind our Lord of His many promises to her on behalf of her family, particularly that none of them should perish. "I will not leave Thy Presence till Thou restore to me my mother," she wept.

While she was yet on her knees her prayer was heard; life returned to the dead woman's body, she revived, spoke, began to mend, and soon grew well again, "resuming her ordinary occupations."

This is perhaps the most extraordinary miracle wrought by God through the intercession of Catherine. And to those modern critics who would urge that Lapa had not really died; that she was merely unconscious, or in a trance, and revived by natural means and by reason of her great vitality, we may answer, in the words of St. Paul: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

(2)

"THE autumn of 1368 established [in Siena] a record which," says a recent writer, "it would be hard to match even among the turbulent Italian cities—four revolutions in less than four months."¹ At the date of Giacomo Benincasa's death Siena was governed "by an oligarchy of small tradesmen," known by reason of their number, according to Tuscan custom, as the Twelve. "Once having won its way to power it showed itself more arrogant, more arbitrary, more regardless of the well-being of the whole commonwealth

¹ F. Schevill, *Siena*, p. 219, *q.v.* See also Langton Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-63.

than its predecessors"—*i.e.*, the Nine, an oligarchy of nobles such as the Salimbeni, the Tolomei—whose fortress-palace, "a huge cube of rough-cut stone, stained to the colour of tarnished silver," still stands as it did in St. Catherine's day—and the Piccolomini, an illustrious family originally of humble origin, of whom Æneas Silvius, Pope Pius II—he who canonized Catherine—was a distinguished son. These names will recur in the history of our Saint, who was to become intimately associated with all of them.

Briefly, it may be said that the original cause of these revolutions and counter-revolutions was the discontent of the nobles and their party at finding themselves "the victims of a shrewd band which in dignity, prestige, and experience of life stood far below their former rulers." Matters were further complicated by the blood-feud existing between the Salimbeni and Tolomei—to which latter family had belonged Blessed Bernard Tolomei, founder of the White, or Olivetan Benedictines, a congregation originally Sienese. But on September 2nd, 1368, this quarrel, and others, having been temporarily composed, the nobles proceeded to the Palazzo Pubblico, and without more ado, drove out the Twelve, and took possession. They then proceeded to set up a government of the nobles, which forfeited its small chance of surviving when Malatesta, the Emperor's Vicar, arrived in Siena with an army, and the Salimbeni deserted to him. This was the first revolution; at the close of which there were three parties in Siena—the *Dodici*, or Twelve; the *Noveschi* (Nine) or the nobles; and that of the Emperor. Malatesta decided to play into the hands of the Twelve, or popular party.

On September 23rd the first and third parties engaged the nobles, and after furious fighting drove them from the Palazzo and from the city. A new government of Twelve *popolani*, embodying all classes of the people, was set up. The Salimbeni received various concessions, including six castles and a large grant of territory. This was the second revolution.

On December 11th the lowest ranks of the people thus represented in the new government—in which were three grades—stormed the Palazzo and drove out the two other

parties. They then added ten councillors to the five who already represented themselves, and called the fifteen the *Riformati*, or reformers. "Each one of these parties had no political programme, other than is expressed by the simple predatory formula: 'To the victors belong the spoils.'" This was the third revolution.

A few days later a fresh outbreak occurred. While the nobles were still carefully excluded, the two parties just turned out in the last revolution managed to regain seats at the Council, though not a preponderance of votes. This coup, which was not carried out without rioting and bloodshed, was the fourth revolution. This "reformed" government of the Fifteen continued its stormy existence undisturbed for a very short time, for on December 22nd the Emperor Charles IV himself arrived in Siena. (It should be remembered that Siena, though one of the autonomous Tuscan Republics, was still a tributary State of the Holy Roman Empire.) He took up his quarters at the Salimbeni Palace, and that powerful family united with the Imperial troops in an endeavour to overthrow the *Riformati*. On January 18th, 1369, a fierce battle took place for the possession of the Campo—that beautiful open space, shaped like a shell, which was the very heart of Siena. The Imperial and noble troops were driven with great slaughter from the city, fighting furiously in the narrow streets, and the tumult of battle thundered at the very door of Catherine's house.

Meanwhile the Emperor, who had taken refuge in the Salimbeni Palace, was crying with rage and fear. "Hysterically embracing and kissing any and all of the victors who approached him, he assured them that he had been deceived and betrayed by his hosts and the Twelve." He promised to depart at once, leaving the *Riformati*, or "Fifteen Defenders," as his Vicars in Siena; and showed a characteristically mercenary spirit in demanding a handsome recompense for all his trouble and expense, "to be paid in four years." The burghers contemptuously threw down the first year's instalment of 5,000 golden florins, and the Emperor relieved the city of his presence.

There were still three parties in Siena, but not those of a



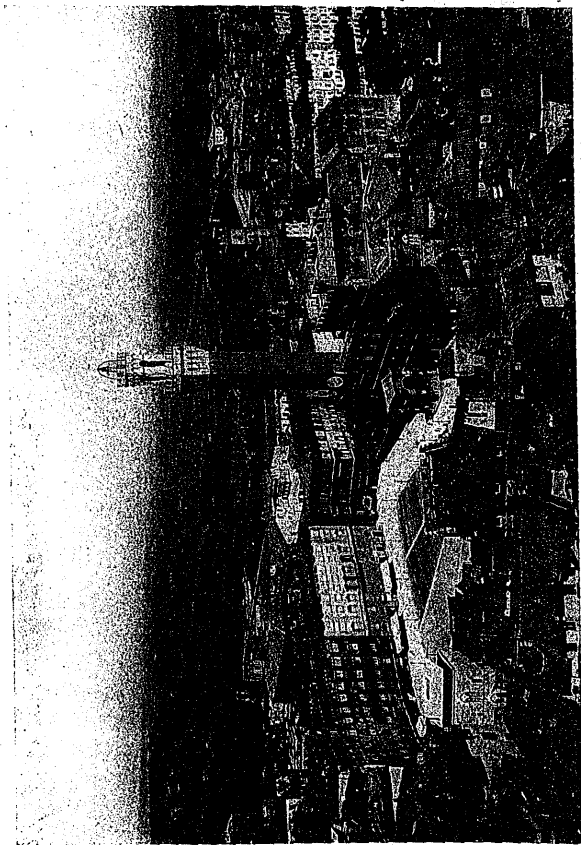


Photo. Alinari.

SIENA, SHOWING THE CAMPO AND PALAZZO PUBBLICO, WITH THE TOWER
OF LA MANGIA

few months earlier. The *Noveschi*, or nobles, were now forced to collaborate with the *Dodici*, or small tradesmen, in order to obtain any sort of success against the third and most numerous party, composed entirely of the *Popolo Minuto*, or artisan class, now known as the *Riformati*. Those who look upon mediæval Italy as ground under the heel of feudalism know little of the fierce revolutionary spirit of the radical, or democratic party of the Tuscan Republics—a spirit which in its blind revolt against rule too often touched the limits of anarchy. It may be said in passing that this summary of the events of four months gives a very fair idea of the contemporary politics of any important Italian city of the *Quattrocento*, where intrigue, plots and perpetual insurrections were as natural to the people as the annual municipal elections would be to any country town in England to-day. In considering the historical setting of St. Catherine's life this stormy and troubled background of perpetually shifting scenes of bloodshed and warfare cannot be too strongly insisted upon, though lack of space forbids our dwelling at length on what is really of the greatest interest and importance. It is above all necessary when we remember that St. Catherine's mission to Italy was that of a Peacemaker. In concentrating upon our central figure we must never lose sight of the details of the picture, for Catherine of Siena is indissolubly associated with one of the most stormy periods of her national history.

The *Riformati* held their own with varying fortunes until 1385. St. Catherine was surely present at the solemn High Mass *Pro Pace*, which they commanded to be sung in the Duomo on January 31st, 1369. To them she addressed at a later period several of her most forcible and striking letters, with regard to the duty they owed to the Holy Father; and they showed their appreciation of her services to Siena by displaying anxiety and uneasiness whenever the *Beata Popolana* was absent from the city.

Not only at Siena, but throughout Tuscany; not only in the world but in the cloister, was there strife and revolt at this time. At Sant' Antonio, says Neri di Donato, writing in 1373, "the Augustinian Friars fell upon their

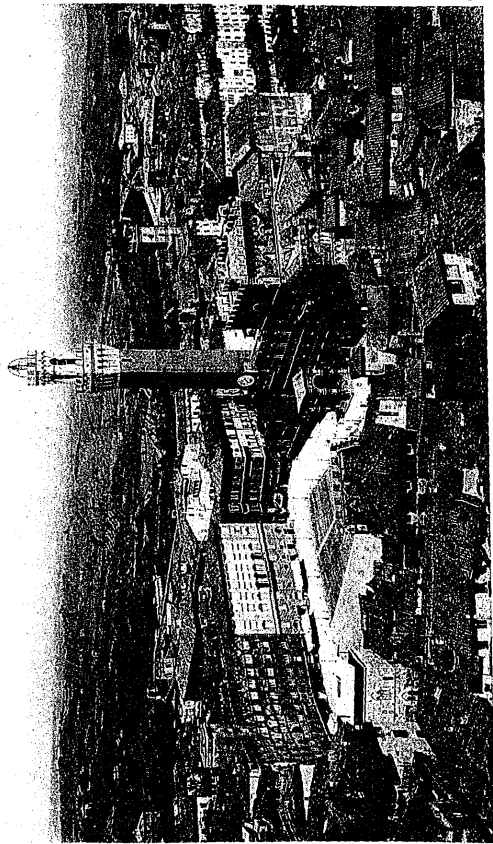


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*SIENA, SHOWING THE CAMPO AND PALAZZO PUBBLICO, WITH THE TOWER
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Provincial and slew him with a dagger. At Siena also they had a great conflict, and one young Friar . . . killed another Friar . . . Those of the Certosa (Carthusians) also had great discussions; and their general came to them and transferred them all . . . At Assisi the Friars Minor fell to quarrelling, and butchered some fourteen of their number. Everywhere in the world apparently there were discussions and bloody encounters innumerable, which I mention not for very shame. In Siena no man understood or kept faith . . . those that ruled, neither amongst themselves, or with others, in any perfect wise. And so the world is all one darkness.”¹ We shall presently see how the means taken by the *Riformati* to improve this state of things in Siena led to even greater evils—if such be conceivable.

Such then was the city and the country on which St. Catherine had already begun to dawn like a star; which she was to guide like an Angel of Peace. She was to endeavour to rouse the foolish, unrealizing people against the greatest peril of all—the terror of the Turk, which hung like a thunder-cloud over Eastern Europe; a peril which the insane folly of these petty internecine quarrels and civil wars increased a hundredfold every year, until in 1453 Constantinople fell amid the last crumbling ruins of the Eastern Empire, and the crescent banner of Islam waved above the trampled cross in Sancta Sophia.

The Benincase belonged to the party of the Twelve, and on one occasion Catherine saved her brothers’ lives by a miracle; it having been revealed to her that the place in which they were forced to hide was unsafe. Taking them by the hand she led them through the city, through the raging tumult of the streets, unhurt and secure, while the hot-blooded *popolani* reverently saluted her—a fact which proves that Catherine had already become a notable figure in Siena, always prompt to recognize genuine holiness. After the middle of August, 1370, however, Benincasa, Bartolo and Stefano thought it prudent to migrate to Florence, where presently we find them enrolled as citizens; and the departure of her beloved Lisa, who accompanied her husband, was a great

¹ Muratori, xv, 238 B.

blow to Catherine. The year 1370 was an important one in her life. "At no period of her history are the records of her supernatural graces more abundant, or more precisely recorded."¹ Already her spiritual family had begun to gather around her, and her life was now indeed a miracle. Her austerities were increased, in reparation, doubtless, for the sins of her city. Her discipline, says Caffarini, who saw it after her death, "was composed of several cords, at the extremity of which were iron points which were intended to rend her flesh. It seemed to have been steeped in a vessel full of blood and then dried." For a whole year, says the same witness, she wore an iron girdle; and he also saw at Venice, where many of her relics were preserved, "the iron chain, garnished with crosses, which served her as a belt." She herself declared to her confessor that she had been allowed to undergo a part of the sufferings of her crucified Redeemer, though it would be impossible to endure them completely. The pains which she thus suffered were not continual, except that one which our Lord underwent when, one of His Hands being already nailed, they drew the other with such violence that all the bones of His breast were dislocated, which the Saint believed to be the greatest torment He endured. "This lengthened torture began on the day when our Lord permitted her to share the sufferings of His Sacred Passion." She bore all with indescribable patience; above all, the ceaseless pain in her side by which she had been permitted to deliver her father's soul from Purgatory. She suffered constantly from violent headache, "yet she never breathed a plaint or showed that she was ill." When any exertion was necessary—and her life henceforth was one long activity—"all her infirmities seemed to vanish; she arose and walked as if she had never known illness or weakness."

Her confessors and all her friends are unanimous as to her inability to receive, or retain, solid food. "She entirely renounced the use of wine and flesh," says her Bull of Canonization, "and ended by eating neither vegetables nor bread. On one occasion she was known to have prolonged her fast from Ash Wednesday until the

¹ Drane, *The History of St. Catherine of Siena, etc.*, p. 93 et seq., q.v.

Feast of the Ascension, taking no food save the Most Holy Eucharist." At first her extraordinary state was considered as a temptation of the devil. Her confessor commanded her to take food daily, and to listen to no visions which would give her contrary advice. But her physical sufferings in obeying were so terrible that the good Friar finally bade her "act according to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; for he saw that our Lord was accomplishing marvellous things in her." "Our Lord so satisfies me in Holy Communion," she said to Fra Tommaso once, "that it is impossible for me to desire any other food. Even when I do not communicate His Presence alone satiates me; and I confess that it makes me happy even to see a priest who has just said Mass."

Naturally enough, her little world murmured against her. Some said: "No one is greater than our Divine Lord, Who ate and drank." Others quoted the Saints who taught that all singularity of this sort was to be avoided. Others again believed that Catherine was the victim of an illusion. Yet others declared that she fasted "through vanity," and ate heartily in secret. But even these last, says Raimondo, were moved to compassion when they saw the acute suffering which any attempt to swallow solid food caused her. Very minute details are given on this point by all her biographers. Stefano Maconi, the "beloved disciple," who knew Catherine first in 1376, tells us that she would wait until everyone had risen from table, and then say with a smile: "Come, let us do justice upon this miserable sinner," swallowing with difficulty the juice of a few herbs. On his advising her affectionately one day to abstain wholly from food, as the insignificant amount she received could not possibly sustain life, she confessed that she tried to take it for three reasons: as a punishment for the sin of gluttony; to avoid scandalizing others; and to force her mind to triumph over her body.

Occupied as she was all day with works of mercy, sometimes till late in the evening, dawn never failed to find Catherine kneeling in San Domenico. Fra Raimondo says that she was often deprived of Holy Communion "through the neglect or fault of the Brethren or Sisters who at this

time directed the Mantellate." She did not, he expressly tells us, communicate daily, but whenever possible. This is also stated in the Bull of Canonization. During 1370 our Lord showed her many marvellous favours in Holy Communion. On the Eve of the Feast of St. Alexis, whilst earnestly praying that her soul might be purified before receiving her Lord, she received an interior assurance that she should communicate on the morrow; and she perceived descending on her soul "a rain of Blood mingled with Fire, which washed not only her soul but her body, and banished even the first principles of evil." But when the day came she was so ill that she felt unable to walk. Nevertheless she arose, and making her way to the Church, she knelt at a side altar. There she remembered that she was forbidden by her Prioress to receive Holy Communion from any priest but her confessor, and prayed earnestly that God would lead him to that altar, that from him she might receive the Bread of Angels. Scarcely was her prayer finished when Fra Tommaso appeared, and began his Mass there, though as he afterwards stated, he had not intended to celebrate that morning, and seldom said Mass at that particular altar. When Catherine advanced to receive Holy Communion her face was glowing with a deep colour, and bathed in tears and drops of sweat. After receiving our Lord she fell into an ecstasy of great length, and when she recovered the use of her faculties, was unable to speak all that day. The next morning her confessor asked her what had happened at the moment of Communion, to give her so high a colour? "I know not, Father, of what colour I was," she humbly replied; and went on to say that at the moment of Communion her senses had been rapt away entirely from material things, which she interiorly perceived to be, together with all intellectual and natural pleasures; "nothing but emptiness and dust." That she had then implored her Divine Spouse that she might henceforth only please and possess Him; that He would take away her will, and give her His. This He had done immediately; promising her that from that moment no exterior event should trouble her heart, change her intention, or disturb her peace.

On the same day, as she fervently offered the supplication to Him Who had given her His own Will: "Create in me a new heart, O God," it seemed to her that our Lord appeared and took away her heart from her body. Fra Tommaso, to whom she related this, laughed at her at first, saying that it was a physical impossibility, in that case, for her to live. But Catherine persisted that God had taken away her heart. Two days later—July 20th, 1370, Feast of St. Margaret—as she was praying after Mass in the Cappella della Volte in San Domenico, the other Mantellate having gone home, she beheld a wondrous vision of our Lord, bearing in His Hands a Heart "radiant, and red as fire, which He placed within her side, saying: 'Daughter, the other day I took thy heart; to-day I give thee Mine, which will henceforward become thine own.'" From this time forward dated St. Catherine's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Henceforth the ejaculation: "My God, I offer Thee Thy Heart," was continually on her lips.

She was now never to approach the altar, especially to receive Holy Communion, without beholding some marvellous vision. Often during Mass she perceived our Lord in the hands of the priest as a babe, or a beautiful child. Sometimes Three Figures appeared there, blending into One. Sometimes it seemed to her that the priest, at the moment of Communion, entered into a blazing furnace of Divine Love. Angels, bearing burning torches, appeared to her round the altar. At the moment of the Fraction of the Host it was revealed to her how our Lord is found, Whole and Entire, in every Particle. One mystic gift was granted to her in a special degree: the power of discerning between a consecrated and an unconsecrated Host. So penetrating and exquisite was the odour she perceived when about to receive her God, that it almost deprived her of consciousness. The beating of her heart could then be distinctly heard—a fact most carefully verified by Fra Tommaso, who says no physical cause could have accounted for the sound, which was entirely supernatural. "Do you not perceive, Father," she said to him one day, "that I am completely changed?" She added with unconscious pathos that the joy and delight which filled her soul were

so great that she felt like a little child of four years old. So great was the love she bore to her neighbour that henceforth she desired only to die for others.

The following day (July 21st), her confessor, fearing that other priests celebrating Mass might be disturbed by Catherine's tears and sobs, desired her to restrain herself outwardly as far as was possible. This she did with simple obedience, praying that God would make Fra



Tommaso understand how difficult it was for her to do so. He received so strong an interior conviction of the fact that he never again "presumed to give her such advice."

On the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, Patroness of the Dominican Order (July 22nd), this Saint appeared to Catherine in the train of our Lord and His Blessed Mother. "Daughter, which dost thou choose," asked the Divine Lover, "Mine or thine?" To which she answered weeping, like Peter on the shores of Galilee:

"Lord, Thou knowest that Thy Will is my will, and Thy Heart my heart." As she spoke she realized the sweetness of the complete surrender which St. Mary Magdalene had made to our Lord when she bathed His Feet with her tears ; and she fixed her eyes upon her. Then our Lord solemnly gave her the Saint as her mother, to whom she might ever turn for counsel or comfort, for she was "charged with her in a special manner." Throughout her remaining years Catherine cherished her protectress with special and tender devotion.

August, 1370, was full of supernatural favours, and was passed by Catherine in almost continual ecstasy. On the Eve of the Feast of St. Dominic she hastened to the church at the first call to Vespers. Fra Bartolommeo, who relates this event, was anxious to see her, as he wished to speak to her ; and finding her there he beheld her face so bright and radiant that he remarked upon it, saying : "We must have good news to-day, for you are quite joyous ?" Then she began to speak to him of St. Dominic. "Do you not see him ?" she asked ; "his face is like that of our Lord—oval, and grave, and tender ; and his hair and beard are of the same colour. At this moment I see him as distinctly as I see you !" Catherine then described to the young Friar the revelation in which the Eternal Father showed her St. Dominic, His son by adoption, shining like a bright star. "Beloved daughter," He said, "I have begotten these two Sons, My Divine Son by nature ; the other by a sweet and tender adoption." And as she marvelled at this comparison of a Saint to our Divine Lord, she was further instructed by a beautiful parallel drawn between the Life of Jesus Christ on earth, and that of His servant Dominic : in obedience, in righteousness, in witness to the Truth, in preaching—for in his sons St. Dominic "preaches still, and will ever preach"—in sending out disciples, in ordering every detail of human life to the glory of God ; and Catherine understood how God could compare the son by adoption to the Son by Nature, Whose Life St. Dominic imitated, and Whose Sacred Body his own was counted worthy to resemble.

While she was speaking, her brother Bartolo passed

down the church. His shadow, his footstep, attracted Catherine's attention for a second. She glanced towards him, and was immediately prevented by a flood of tears from continuing to speak. Fra Bartolommeo waited for some time in silence, and presently heard Catherine begin to utter broken phrases of bitter self-reproach and condemnation. He questioned her, and she explained that our Lady had severely rebuked her for having turned to look at a human being at the moment when she was receiving a revelation from God. The Friar tried in vain to console her, and she went home, still weeping. Later on she declared that St. Paul had rebuked her so sharply for this fault that she could scarcely endure the shame. "If the reproaches of an Apostle cover me with such confusion now," she said to her confessor, "imagine what it will be like to bear those of Jesus Christ at the Day of Judgment!" Fra Raimondo also refers to this incident which, with another he relates, serve, he says, "to teach humility both to the perfect and to the imperfect."

On August 15th, Feast of the Assumption, Catherine was too ill to leave her bed. Looking out of her window, towards the Duomo in which was being celebrated the Patronal Feast, she heard miraculously the chanting of the Mass; and at those words of the Preface: "*et Te in Assumptione Beatæ Mariæ*" fell into an ecstasy, in which our Lady Herself visited and spoke with her. On coming out of this ecstasy Catherine could only repeat again and again: "O most Sweet Jesus, Son of the Living God"—and then, as was her custom, after a little pause: "and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have mercy upon us."

Three days later, on August 18th, at the moment of the "*Domine, non sum dignus*" before her own Communion in San Domenico, she heard a voice in her soul make answer: "But I am worthy to enter into thee." So penetrated was the Saint with the adorable Majesty of God that all strength forsook her, and she was scarcely able to reach her cell; where she fell into a long ecstasy, during which three persons beheld her body elevated above the ground. When she returned to herself she began to pray "such sweet and admirable things" that those

present were moved to tears. Amongst others she prayed for her confessor, who naïvely remarks that at that time he was in church, and "in nowise disposed to experience sensible devotion." Suddenly he became rapt in so marvellous a fervour that in all simplicity he set himself to examine his soul. Later, a friend of Catherine's told him what had happened; that the Saint had begged for an assurance of his salvation, and stretching forth her hand exclaimed: "Promise me that you will grant it!" Then, as was her custom in keen suffering, she cried: "May Jesus Christ be praised!"

Fra Tommaso hastened to his spiritual child and desired her to tell him all that had taken place. She said that at the moment of her request she had stretched forth her hand, at our Divine Lord's command, and He had pressed a nail into her palm with such force that it seemed as if the hand was pierced through and through, "as if the nail had been driven in by a hammer." This was the prelude to that even more marvellous day, when in Pisa a few years later Catherine was to receive in hands and feet and side the Stigmata of her Divine Spouse. From this moment she felt the wound in her hand continually, though it was invisible.

It was shortly after this, and probably before Lapa's miraculous restoration from death, which we are told took place in October, 1370, that the most astounding event in Catherine's wonderful life took place—an event which Fra Raimondo was himself at first reluctant to publish, though absolutely convinced of its truth. On a certain Sunday morning, as Fra Bartolommeo was preaching in San Domenico, word was hastily brought that Catherine was dying. Several Friars, and many of the congregation hastened to the Fullonica. Amongst them were her confessor, Fra Tommaso Caffarini, the Director of the Mantellate (Fra Antonio Bartolommeo di Montuccio) and a lay brother, Giovanni of Siena. There could be no doubt that Catherine was indeed in her agony, and Fra Giovanni wept so bitterly at the sight that he broke a blood-vessel, and was himself at the point of death. Fra della Fonte, however, strong in faith, wrought his immediate cure by touching his chest with Catherine's

inanimate hand. This miracle was witnessed by all the people who crowded into the cell, which was now full. Lapa's grief, ill as she was herself, can be imagined, and some of her friends strove to comfort her, while others began to prepare for Catherine's burial.

For four hours she lay dead. Suddenly life was restored to her. She opened her eyes and looked round her, while her friends scarce dared to believe for gladness. But both to Fra Bartolommeo, who in Fra Tommaso's absence acted as her confessor; and a few years later to Fra Raimondo himself, Catherine declared that during those four hours her soul had really been separated from her body. This natural death was, say her biographers, the result of her supernatural sufferings. Her heart literally broke from too vivid a realization of the agony endured by her crucified Redeemer, and from her intense desire to be united with Him. "No heart of stone or of iron," she said to Raimondo, "could have resisted such a force." Most solemn are the words in which she relates her visions during these hours. "I saw," she said, "the secret things of God. My soul entered the unseen world. I saw the glory of the Eternal, and the pains of hell and purgatory, which no words of mine can describe. I beheld the joys of Heaven, and hoped that at last I had attained to them. I was full of anguish when our Lord showed me that I must return to the world again. But He said to me: 'There are many souls to be saved by thee. No longer shalt thou live as thou hast done. Thou must renounce thy cell, and go forth into the city and the world in order to win them to Me. I will ever be with thee; I will guide thee; I will trust thee with the Honour of My Holy Name; thou shalt teach My Doctrine to the high and to the lowly, for I will put words in thy lips which none shall resist. I will impart to thee speech and wisdom, and bring thee before Pontiffs and rulers of the people. Only in all things thou shalt be conformed to My Will.'"

For three days and three nights after her miraculous restoration Catherine wept, "overcome with sorrow at recalling the glory she then possessed." Then, strengthened and sustained by the Divine Promise, Catherine of Siena arose, and went forth to do her Lord's bidding.

From this day dates the period when she became, first in her own, and then in strange cities, the Peacemaker, the Ambassador of Christ.

(3)

SINCE 1367 St. Catherine's life had been one of almost ceaseless activity among the poor and lowly of her own city. Her fame had spread through Siena and the adjoining *contado*. She was now to come into contact with the powerful families of the nobles—the *Noveschi* party; and was henceforth to exercise a steadily-growing political influence which ended in making her one of the most important factors in the history of her country in the fourteenth century.

Of the many interesting stories which belong to this period we can only outline a few examples. Andrea di Naddino de' Bellanti was a rich young noble whose vices were extraordinary even in that vicious age. Drunkard, gambler and worse, he had long given up all practices of religion; he could not speak without blaspheming; in a fit of blind rage he had destroyed a picture of the Crucifixion with his dagger, and had committed several other fearful acts of sacrilege. Late in 1370 sudden illness fell upon him, but his parish-priest, who visited him, fled before the torrent of blasphemy poured out upon him by the sick man, who refused to hear of confession. On December 15th Fra Tommaso della Fonte was called to him, and for three days sought to move him to repentance. All being in vain, the Friar, on the third evening, came to Catherine's cell; and finding her in ecstasy, left a message with her companions that she should pray for the wretched man dying in mortal sin. About an hour before midnight Catherine came to her senses, and receiving the message from the Mantellata who was her companion, began to storm Heaven with her prayers for Bellanti. Scarcely had she begun when the sick man called to his wife to send for a priest, crying out that in a corner of the room our Lord stood commanding him to confess, "and beside Him that

Mantellata they call Catherine.” With shame, grief, and true contrition he made his confession, and also—though he had always refused to do so during his illness—his will; distributing his wealth wisely and well, and immediately afterwards breathing his last in peace.

This conversion was noised abroad throughout Siena to the amazement of everyone. At first it was not believed, for Bellanti’s treatment of priests was well known. Fra Tommaso himself was astounded, and at once sought Catherine, who not only confirmed the fact, but described minutely the appearance of Bellanti, whom she had never seen; and of the richly-furnished chamber in which his soul had passed away, though she had never been inside the house. This event created a great sensation, and throughout Siena men became convinced of the efficacy of Catherine’s prayers.

In February, 1371, Catherine was staying—probably at the Saraceni palace—with her greatest friend after Lisa, Monna Alessia Saraceni, a Mantellata and young widow who lived with her father-in-law. Alessia, attracted one morning by a great noise, went to the window, and beheld a spectacle of inconceivable horror which, in those barbarous days, was unfortunately of ordinary occurrence. She called her friend, and Catherine, moved “not by curiosity, but by holy pity,” joined her at the window. In the street surged and roared a great crowd round an open cart, in which sat two wretched men, notorious brigands, who, having been caught, were expiating part of their sentence on the way to the scaffold. Tightly bound to stakes, their flesh was being torn from their bodies by the executioners with red-hot pincers.

When we pause for an instant to realize this unspeakable barbarity two things will strike us specially: the appalling state of savage cruelty which prevailed even in the most civilized countries in St. Catherine’s day, and indeed for centuries later; and the psychological attitude of men, in mediæval days, towards pain and death. To say that such things would be impossible now is merely to beg the question. They were then not only possible, but natural, and of universal acceptance. This fact, and all that it entails, should never be lost sight of for an

instant in considering the question, so often and uselessly discussed, of the "tortures of the Inquisition"—which were indeed mere child's play to those inflicted by every civilized state in the Middle Ages, taken as they were for granted as a fitting part of almost every legal punishment.

The brigands had refused to see a priest, or to give any sign of repentance, and were going to their awful death in indescribable agonies, with the vilest blasphemies on their lips. Catherine, as she gazed, beheld a troop of devils who were tormenting their souls with far worse pains than those their bodies suffered from the executioners. Time was short. She betook herself to prayer so fervently that the demons were roused to fury, and threatened to possess and torment her as they tormented the unfortunates already in their power. To this threat she answered with quiet confidence: "Whatever God wills, I will." By this time the sad procession had arrived at the foot of the scaffold, and there, "covered with wounds and bathed in His Precious Blood," our Merciful Redeemer appeared to the two unhappy thieves, offering them pardon for their repentance. In an instant their hearts were melted. They begged for a priest, confessed their crimes, and "went steadfastly to death as if they were going to a feast," so that the very executioners marvelled. And not only did Catherine's prayer deliver them from hell, but it opened Heaven to them immediately, so that she thanked our Lord for having "delivered them from a second prison"—the pain and bitterness of Purgatory. "Of all the prodigies wrought by her," says Fra Raimondo, "I find none comparable to this."

From this time until her death Catherine was constantly called upon to exercise her power of prayer over unclean spirits—notably a few years later at Rocca d'Orcia. On their part the devils never ceased their attempts to destroy her body and to wound her soul. Not long after this we hear of her casting out the evil spirit which possessed Laurentia Monaldi, a little motherless girl of eight, who, placed by her father in a convent, according to the custom of those days, until she should be old enough to receive the habit, had been so grievously tormented by

the devil that her life was actually in danger. Everyone now began to speak of Catherine's miraculous gifts. She was next brought into contact with one of the most powerful families of Siena. Rabes, wife of Francesco Tolomei, a gentle and pious lady, was greatly concerned about her daughters, Francesca and Ghinoccia, who were leaders of the extravagant and often immodest feminine fashions in the city. The two girls cared for nothing but dress and finery, and daily spent hours in painting their faces and necks, as the custom was, and in endeavouring to dye their hair to the fashionable shade of pale gold. At their mother's invitation Catherine pleaded with the young patricians, so successfully that Ghinoccia actually cut off her beautiful hair—her chief temptation to vanity—and became a Mantellata; followed shortly afterwards by Francesca. But Giacomo, the eldest son, a wild and vicious youth, whose hands were stained with several murders and who was now absent from home, returned in a furious passion when he heard of these things, declaring he would tear the habit of Penance from his sisters' shoulders, and slay at sight anyone who should attempt to prevent him. His mother, greatly alarmed, warned Catherine, who sent Fra Tommaso with a message to the young man, for whom she promised to pray. But Giacomo repulsed the Friar with scorn. The only person who dared to argue with him was his young brother Matteo, who became Catherine's disciple and who subsequently entered the Dominican Order. This boy told him bravely that were he to see and speak with the Saint he would certainly repent, and confess his sins. But Giacomo, foaming with rage, illtreated the boy, and entering the Tolomei Palace stormed with fury, threatening to slay "everyone concerned in this folly." His mother tried to soothe him, and induced him to postpone the slaughter till next day! In the morning Fra Tommaso and Fra Bartolommeo went to the palace, and courageously attempted to bring the youth to his senses. For some time all was in vain; then he suddenly yielded, asking one of them to confess him on the spot. Entering the Fullonica as they returned, one of the Sisters informed them that Catherine "had already told her of the whole matter." Giacomo subsequently

entered the Third Order of Penance himself ; married, and lived an excellent life ; while his sisters persevered in their vocation.

The following is perhaps one of the most touching stories connected with St. Catherine. Fra Bartolommeo tells us that Francesco Saraceni, the father-in-law of the Saint's friend Alessia, an old man of eighty, had only once in his life made his confession, and had never received Holy Communion. At Alessia's earnest request Catherine became an honoured guest in the old nobleman's house, where she spent a whole winter, Alessia hoping that during the long evenings her friend might find some opportunity for influencing the old man to make his peace with God. At first Saraceni mocked at all Catherine's arguments, but a day came when he promised her he would do anything she asked him. Then he told her with childlike simplicity that he had an enemy, the Prior of a certain church in Siena, who had grievously injured him, so that from day to day he sought this priest's life. She told him that his sins would be forgiven him in the measure of his forgiveness of others.

Early next morning old Saraceni arose, and taking his dearest treasure, a favourite hunting falcon, went off alone to find his enemy and to forgive him. The Prior most naturally fled at the sight of him, but the old nobleman requested a Canon to go after him, and tell him not to be afraid, for he came to bring him good news. Then the Prior—whose part in this story is not heroic—finding Saraceni was unarmed, agreed to see him in the presence of several of his own friends. Saraceni, his falcon on his wrist, entered the room, bowed his white head, and saluted his enemy courteously. "The grace of God hath touched my heart," he said simply ; "I am come to offer to be reconciled to you ; and to prove my sincerity I entreat you to accept this falcon, of which I am very fond."

It does not appear that the Prior refused this inexpressibly pathetic gift ; and much as we may regret the fact there is no doubt that the fiery old gentleman would have been mortally offended had he done so. Peace was concluded, and Saraceni went straight back to Catherine. "I have obeyed you," he said ; "what must I do next ?"



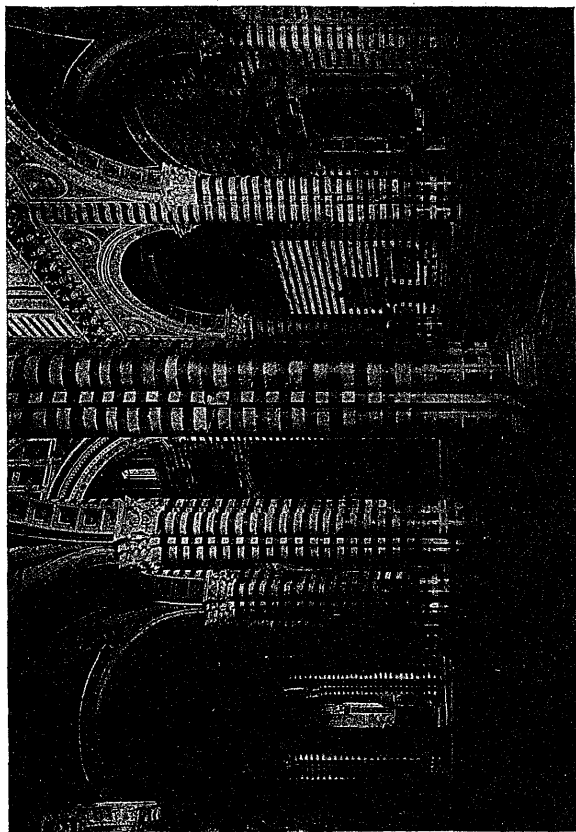


Photo. Alinari.

INTERIOR OF THE CATHEDRAL, SIENA

She sent him to Fra Bartolommeo, and his general confession occupied three days, at the end of which time the young priest, scarcely knowing what penance to give him, "on account of his great age and of his poverty," imposed a nominal one, and sent the nobleman back to the dyer's daughter, telling him to ask her to impose a penance, "for what she gives you, I give also."

So, "for a certain period," the old man daily made his way silently, at dawn, to the neighbouring Cathedral, holding in his trembling hand Catherine's gift, "a cord with a hundred knots," on which he recited a hundred Paters and a hundred Aves. Humbly he kept all his promises; never failing now to enter every church he passed, and to worship there the God Whom for eighty years he had rejected. The following Lent he fasted scrupulously, "attending all the sermons," and died peacefully at the age of eighty-one, his last moments soothed, we may be sure, by Catherine's presence and prayers. A story more human in its exquisite simplicity and pathos, both sin and repentance being so entirely characteristic of Saraceni's race and times, it would be impossible to find.

Curiously enough, another old nobleman of the same family was to owe his salvation to Catherine's prayers. This was Niccolo Saraceni, who, after a brilliant career as a warrior, "full of glorious exploits," returned to Siena to spend the remainder of his life peaceably at home with his wife. But as nothing she could say would make him fulfil any of his religious duties she turned to Catherine, whom she knew and loved. But Niccolo contemptuously refused to see the dyer's daughter. "What have I to do with that good woman?" the old knight would inquire; "what good could she do me?" One night, however, he woke in terror. "I saw that Catherine of yours in my dream," he remarked to his wife. "You may bring her to see me to-morrow—just to see if she resembles the person I saw in my sleep." But though he momentarily saved his dignity Catherine had no difficulty, when they did meet, in persuading him to make his confession to Fra Tommaso. A day or two later this priest met Niccolo in the morning, and on his inquiring where Catherine might

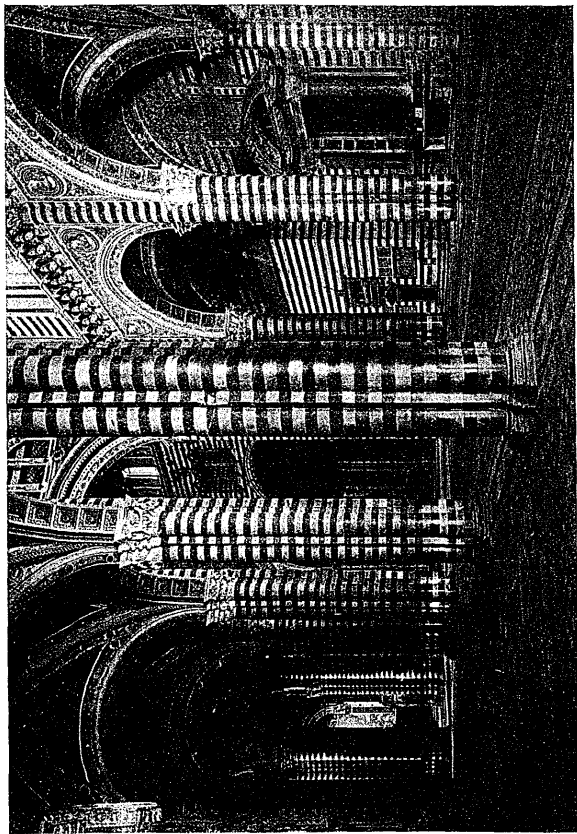


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be found the good Friar directed him to San Domenico, and at Saraceni's request, accompanied him thither. Catherine came immediately, saluting Niccolo with courtesy and respect. He had come to tell her he had made his confession; on which she congratulated him, adding: "Signore, have you confessed everything?" On his replying: "Yes," she bade him examine his conscience carefully. He was confident that he had forgotten nothing. Then, drawing him aside, she recalled to his memory a certain grievous sin which was known to no living man, committed long ago in a foreign country. Impressed beyond measure, Saraceni went in search of Fra Tommaso, completed his confession, and henceforth delighted in relating this story everywhere in Catherine's honour. "Here is a prophetess," he would say, "who told me all the things that ever I did."

Catherine's "companions" have been frequently mentioned. She was now the centre of a little band of men and women drawn from all degrees of society, and from all the political parties in Siena. Lisa, her earliest friend, was away with Bartolo in Florence; but several of the Mantellate, with whom she continually associated, were her special companions. Such were Alessia Saraceni and Cecca Gori—the former of whom loved Catherine so dearly that she could never bear to be absent from her. Both these ladies, who were of noble family, acted as Catherine's secretaries, for she could not write. Giovanna da Capo and Caterina Scetto were two others continually with her, so that even at prayer in her cell she was seldom alone. But this was not all. "She attracted to the path of Perfection," says Caffarini, "a great number of religious, Preaching Friars, Friars Minor, Hermits of St. Augustine; young and old, ignorant and learned, men and women, nobles and those of low estate." The names of some of those priests who were to be so closely associated with her mission—chiefly Dominicans—have already been mentioned. In 1373 she met Fra Raimondo of Capua, and immediately recognized in him the confessor promised to her some years previously by our Lady, who told her he should help her more than any other had done. Raimondo was sent to Siena as Lector from Montepulciano

in 1373 ; and the Saint saw him for the first time when he was acting as Deacon at High Mass in San Domenico on the Feast of St. John the Baptist. It is unnecessary to say anything in this place as to Catherine's illustrious Director and biographer—his beautiful character with its apparently single weakness—a certain timidity and hesitation at critical moments—cannot fail to appear vividly in any Life of St. Catherine. For as every one of these is founded upon Fra Raimondo's *Legenda*, in which the simplicity and holiness of that good man are revealed on every page, he becomes in a sense his own biographer, as well as that of his beloved spiritual daughter, with whose life his own was now to be so closely connected.

With very beautiful humility Fra Tommaso della Fonte now stepped aside, willingly agreeing to this change of confessors ; and in handing over the direction of Catherine to Fra Raimondo gave him all the notes on her case, which he had compiled with great care from 1358, and which filled four closely-written volumes. From these Raimondo composed that part of his *Legenda* which treats of these years. From the beginning of their acquaintance Catherine "addressed herself more confidently" to Fra Raimondo when she desired to communicate than to any other Friar of San Domenico, for, he says : "I exerted my best efforts to procure her the privilege of receiving Holy Communion," as to which, as will appear, there had been difficulties. Both he and Fra Tommaso Caffarini were literary and deeply-learned men, and with such friends as these it is not wonderful that, as Fra Bartolommeo tells us, everyone said of Catherine's learning that the Friars Preachers had taught her ; "whereas it was she who instructed us." Young as she was—twenty-six when Fra Raimondo came to Siena—her priest-friends, young and old, addressed her as "Mother," and treated her words and counsels with the same respect as they would have shown to those of an old and experienced Religious.

Laymen, too, married and unmarried, flocked to her side, in spite of the human jealousy and envy of those who found it strange that a girl like Catherine should be surrounded by young men—*Caterinati*, as they were

contemptuously called by her enemies.¹ Such were Francesco Malavolti, whose frequent relapses into sin caused the Saint so many tears that, as she once wrote to him, she might well call him "dear"; Tommaso di Guelfaccio; Nigi di Doccio, who mourned her death so tenderly; his friend Gabriele di Davino Piccolomini; and Niccolo di Bino Ghetti—the last a wild and dissolute youth brought to Catherine by Malavolti, and who, like Malavolti, originally came with the intention of insulting her. Here, too, were Andrea Vanni, the Sienese artist who painted that portrait of Catherine from an engraving of which our frontispiece is reproduced; Ser Cristofano di Gano Guidini, a middle-aged, steady, hard-working notary of Siena, who placed himself entirely under Catherine's direction, and frequently acted as her secretary; and last, but not least, the youth who was the first to enjoy her friendship of the three young nobles who subsequently became the Saint's regular secretaries—Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi, whom Catherine loved with a very special confidence. He it was who, attracted by her sanctity, first offered himself as her disciple, and who introduced to her nearly all his friends. There can be no comparisons in friendship—especially such friendship as Catherine's. But though Stefano Maconi, whom she first met three years later, was to be her best-loved son; though, as Fra Raimondo says, the Saint had an especial tenderness for the young Florentine noble, Barduccio Canigiani—of these, her three secretaries, she never forgot that Neri was her oldest friend. Young, with great literary gifts, especially in writing verse, he seems first to have met Catherine during that mystic year of 1370. Henceforth—his home being in Siena—he never left her unless she sent him away; accompanying her and her friends on her missions, and devoting his life entirely to working for her. A lovable and sensitive soul, Neri was subject to fits of deep depression, and to this, and to his naturally melancholy nature Catherine's buoyant optimism and unfailing cheerfulness were the best antidote. His great want of self-confidence made it difficult for him

¹ See, for the best account of St. Catherine's spiritual family, Gardner, *St. Catherine of Siena* (Dent, 1907), ch. v, "The Spiritual Fellowship."

to believe that Catherine really cared for him as her son and disciple. In one of her letters to him, dictated in answer to his request that she would so accept him, she says : " I have received, and do receive you with tender love "—a method of address which shows how completely supernaturalized were the relations between Catherine and her " sons." That such relations were possible at all is a conclusive proof as to the position Catherine had gained in public opinion at Siena, in spite of jealousy and slanders. Above all it shows the extraordinary influence that Catherine possessed over the souls of men, so that her spiritual friendship became the strongest factor in their lives.

Some, of course, came to her at first from curiosity ; while others, such as Francesco Malavolti, who was induced to visit Catherine by his greatest friend, Neri di Landoccio, had an even less worthy intention. He was a young married man of noble family, but of vicious and immoral life, and he declared that if the Saint said a word to him about Confession—as was her invariable practice in such cases as his—" to answer her in such wise she would never speak to him again." But her gentle presence so moved him ; her words and still more her prayers so touched his heart that the rough and violent youth, though as he tells us he now and then relapsed into his former practices—always in Catherine's absence—became a faithful husband and a devout Catholic. After Catherine's death, and that of his wife, when he was thinking of entering a military Order, he was guided by Catherine to seek his vocation with the Olivetan Benedictines, though he eventually died in the black habit of the Benedictines of Monte Cassino.

To all these names must be added that of a very different man—one of the Augustinian Hermits of Lecceto, a few miles out of Siena, where Catherine was to make so many friends. This was Fra Giovanni Tantucci, S.T.M., who had studied and taken his Doctor's degree at Cambridge, and was usually known as Fra Giovanni Terzo, to distinguish him from two other members of the same Order. He originally came to see Catherine with a certain learned Franciscan of the Lazzarino type, intending to lead her on

to speak on holy things, and "to silence her with difficult theological questions." But after the two Friars, "like two raging lions," had plied the Saint, in the presence of a number of her disciples, with the most difficult questions they could propose, hoping to confound her publicly, they were not only rebuked by her answers, but converted by her burning words on the Love of Christ to a more perfect observance of their vows. Each distributed among his brethren and the poor all his earthly possessions; and Fra Giovanni, retaining only his breviary, became one of the most devoted followers of the Saint, at whose death he was present. "He was one of the three confessors appointed by the Pope to hear the confessions of those who were converted through Catherine." Another Augustinian of Lecceto, William Flete, an Englishman, also at this time made Catherine's acquaintance, and became her correspondent and firm friend. Such, in 1373, were the principal companions of St. Catherine, but during the few remaining years of her eventful life others were continually to be drawn into the circle of the Little Company of Catherine.

The relations between the Fullonica and San Domenico were thus those of very tender and reverent friendship, of which one characteristic incident may be related. In September, 1372, as Catherine was weeping over her sins, "our Lord appeared to her, and bidding her weep no more, extended His Hand over her head and pronounced the customary formula of Absolution." This grace, which caused her intense joy, was followed by a prolonged fast until Ascension Day in 1373. So weak had she become by Rogation-tide that she was unable to go to church for Holy Communion, which, says Caffarini, was miraculously given to her by Angels in her cell. Her state was such that Alessia and some of the Friars feared for her life. But on Ascension Day she went to San Domenico for Mass, and after Communion fell into an ecstasy in which she continued until the Brethren returned to choir to finish chanting their grace after their noonday meal. This done, some of them came to look at Catherine, when she rose, and coming to them with a joyful countenance invited them in the name of the Lord to come home and eat

with her "for their consolation." Six Friars accepted her invitation, but as Monna Lapa, taken unawares, had nothing to set before them, they sent back to the monastery for some of their own dinner, beans dressed in oil, "of which they all ate together, rejoicing."¹

So much for one side of the picture. Let us now for a moment consider the other. "Though," says the old English translation, "it was well knowen that she had the spyryte of prophecie, nevertheles yet there were somme that bacbyted her, and sayde that the spyryte the whiche she had was none spyryte of prophecie, but rather a spyryte of deceyte, the whiche is ofte times by the fende (fiend) gyven specially to wymmen." Catherine could now scarcely perform any public exercise without exciting calumny, says Raimondo, and her severest critics were to be found among the Friars themselves, and among her Sisters the Mantellate. As regards the latter, the inference is plain. As regards the Friars it is easy to suppose that the contempt of the less spiritual and humble was excited by the sight of some of the wisest of their number following the direction of a woman. Though his name is unknown, a single sad case is mentioned of one who, attracted to Catherine for wholly unspiritual reasons, found himself regarded by her with horror. Full of rage and despair he left the Order, to which he never returned. He vented his anger upon Catherine, however, as we shall see directly, in a cruel and brutal way.

"Genuine descendants of Eve," the Superiors of the Sisters of Penance persuaded some of the Dominican Friars to refuse Catherine Holy Communion, and even sometimes confession. Jealous of her reputation and of her supernatural favours, and pretending to believe her prolonged devotions were a snare of the devil, they required her to leave the church when Mass was over, with the rest of the Mantellate; "which was wholly impossible, for she communicated with such fervour that she lost the use of her senses . . . for several hours." Cruel, and even brutal when roused, the Tuscan women who saw these things, influenced by the Sisters, would roughly

¹ The Benincasa family had been reduced to poverty in the revolution of 1368-9.

carry her out of church, throwing her down, all rigid as she was, in the burning sunshine, while Alessia and a few of the faithful Mantellate stood by weeping, but not daring to interfere. Several times she was kicked as she lay unconscious in the street ; and one woman who did so expired shortly afterwards in agony, without having received the last Sacraments. A man " well known " to Fra Raimondo—he is believed to be the unfortunate Friar referred to above—not only kicked her and carried her out to the church door while insensible, but threatened her life. Shortly afterwards he became possessed by a devil, and after several attempts at suicide, hanged himself like Judas, and was buried in unconsecrated ground. A Religious insulted her coarsely in the presence of her companions, and took from her, while unconscious, the money given to her to distribute in alms. But Catherine received all with exceeding meekness, and never murmured nor complained.

Among the sick to whom Catherine ministered daily was a Sister of Penance named Andrea, who was dying in agony from cancer. So revolting were the symptoms that no one else would remain in the room with her, and she would have been deserted but for Catherine, who tended her like a daughter, performing the most repulsive duties as if they were sweet to her—as indeed they were. The Saint forced herself on two occasions to overcome her physical nausea by heroic acts too astounding and terrible to bear recording. But by a subtle and not uncommon process the dying woman became jealous of Catherine's charity, which she attributed to vanity ! She began to spread abroad accusations against the girl's personal character too grave to be overlooked by the Mantellate, and some of them, perhaps not ill-pleased, sent for Catherine, and insulted her grossly before inquiring how it was possible that she had allowed herself to fall into sin ? To all this she replied with great gentleness that these accusations against her purity were absolutely untrue. But to our Lord, in her quiet cell, she poured out the bitterness of her heart.

Then He appeared to her, in glory, holding in His right Hand a jewelled golden crown, and in His left, a crown of

thorns. "My daughter," He said, "both of these you must wear. Choose now that which you will wear in this life." She held out her hands towards the crown of thorns, which her Divine Spouse pressed upon her head so firmly "that the thorns entered in on all sides"; and for long afterwards she felt the wounds. He bade her complete her work, fearing nothing, for that all that Satan had prepared should be turned to His glory. In spite, therefore, of Monna Lapa's indignant remonstrances Catherine returned to her patient, who continued unmoved and bitter until one day, as the Saint stood by her bed, Andrea beheld in a great light which filled the room, not the despised dyer's daughter, but an Angel of the Lord. Overwhelmed at the sight, she sought St. Catherine's pardon with tears. Catherine tenderly embraced her, and Andrea, sending for the Mantellate to whom she had calumniated her, confessed her sin with bitter weeping.

From that day Catherine was called "the Saint" by all who knew her. Like her crucified Lord, she had overcome the world.

Two events took place during this memorable year of 1373; one of world-wide, one of merely local, importance; though both were destined to exercise a far-reaching influence on Catherine's life. Pope Gregory XI proclaimed a Crusade of Christendom against the Turk; and in the month of November an envoy from Bernabo Visconti, Tyrant of Milan, arrived at Siena to seek an interview with Catherine in the name of his master and that of his wife, Beatrice Regina della Scala.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSION OF PEACE TO TUSCANY

(1374-1376)

(I)

BERNABO VISCONTI, Tyrant of Milan, and black sheep of Italy for many years, was the human instrument which sent St. Catherine abroad on her various missions to Tuscany. The Visconti were at the root of the trouble now fermenting in many an Italian commune with regard to its temporal allegiance to the Holy See in matters political. For many years Bernabo at Milan, and his dissolute brother Galeazzo at Pavia, had set the Pope at defiance. Bernabo's excesses were unsurpassed even in an age of tyrants. Ezzelino da Romano himself had been no worse than he. "A man of fierce passions, subject to paroxysms of bestial fury, he was a cruel and sanguinary tyrant, but a prudent and subtle politician. A mighty hunter, he enforced his game-laws by wholesale blinding, torturing, and hanging of his unhappy *contadini*. On one occasion he burnt alive two [Dominican] friars who had rebuked him for these proceedings. He ground down his people with taxation, and quartered his 5,000 hunting dogs upon the citizens and convents."¹ If any of these dogs fell ill the monks in charge of the pack were cruelly and often fatally beaten. Bernabo had married Beatrix Regina della Scala, of the family of Can Grande, of Verona—a woman in many respects his feminine counterpart. Threats, rebukes, and excommunications were wasted on Bernabo. In 1361 he had forced the Legates of Innocent VI to swallow the parchment of the Papal Bull of which they were the bearers to him, with its silken strings and leaden seal; further insulting them so outrageously that the Archbishop of Milan dared to interpose. "I would have you know," shouted the tyrant to this prelate, "that I am Pope, Emperor, and King in my

¹ Gardner, *St. Catherine of Siena*, p. 31, et seq., q.v.

own territory. God Himself could do nothing here unless I chose to permit it!"

One of these Legates, a Frenchman, was next year elected Pope, as Urban V. To Bernabo's ambassadors, when they came to congratulate him, the new-made Pontiff made known solemnly that their master, being excommunicated, could only be received back into the Church after he had repented of his sins, and restored the property of which he had robbed the Holy See. But so far from repenting, Bernabo's career of crime had grown continually darker, until, as a temporal Ruler, the Pope was obliged to declare war against him, and invited the Emperor Charles V, King Louis of Hungary, and Giovanna, Queen of Naples, to join him in an offensive and defensive league against this powerful and terrible enemy.

Such was the state of affairs when, in 1373-4, Bernabo sent two envoys to Siena, of whom one was commissioned to beg St. Catherine to use her influence to secure the goodwill of the Sienese towards the Visconti, at present involved in fresh troubles with Gregory XI on account of Bernabo's outrageous treatment of the clergy in the Archdiocese of Milan. It is an interesting proof of the fact that Catherine's fame had already reached far beyond Siena—beyond Tuscany itself. Catherine dictated letters to him and to Beatrice, who had sent her messages, which speedily convinced him he had nothing to hope for from her. Though not her first political letters—for in 1372 she had already written twice to the Cardinal-Legate in Bologna, Pierre d'Estaing, the Papal Vicar in Italy—these to the Visconti were the first addressed by her to secular rulers. The letters of 1372 show that her political influence was already fairly established. "When the curtain rises to display her public life at last begun, we find to our wonder that in reality it must have begun long before."

"I pray you," writes Catherine to her "dearest Father and Brother in Christ," "to do nothing against your Head . . . To see His ministers persecuted is above all things the most displeasing to God . . . Thus I wish you to become a faithful son of the Church by bathing yourself in the Blood of Jesus Christ Crucified . . . You

will be delivered from the slavery of mortal sin, and from rebellion against Holy Church ; you will be strong with the strength of Grace, which will abide in you, and you will be united to your Father. I implore you to accomplish this union perfectly, and to delay no longer.” “ With these first political letters Catherine entered into the national life of her country.”

In May, 1374, Catherine was summoned by the Master-General of the Order, Fra Elias of Toulouse, to appear before the General Chapter held in Sta Maria Novella at Florence. It is evident that her reputation as a Saint, as well as some of the accusations against her, had reached the ears of those in authority, and that the General Chapter desired to inquire into her manner of life. We know, however, nothing of the proceedings upon this occasion. The Saint spent several weeks in the Lily City, where the plague was already making great ravages ; forming many new friendships, among them one with Niccolo Soderini, “ a man most faithful to God and the republic, and strongly devoted to Catherine ”—a leading politician of whom we shall hear more—and with two people in a humbler station, probably friends of Lisa’s (in whose house the Saint doubtless stayed). These were Francesco Pippino, a tailor, and Monna Agnese, his wife, who became her disciples and correspondents, and who were one day to prove themselves Catherine’s best and most courageous friends in Florence. Bartolo accompanied her on her return to Siena, to see his mother, and his children, a number of whom were in Monna Lapa’s care at the Fullonica. He seems to have been of a more lovable disposition than Benincasa, whom Catherine had already rebuked by letter for his “ ingratitude, and his ignorance of the duty he owed his mother.” When the brother and sister reached home at the end of June they found Siena agonizing in the throes of an awful visitation of the plague. A third of the population perished. The greatest mortality was among children, and Death reaped a sad harvest at the Fullonica, where many of Lapa’s grandchildren died, and also her son Bartolo and her daughter Lisa. Stefano, too, Catherine’s old play-fellow, died in Rome at this time, having gone there on



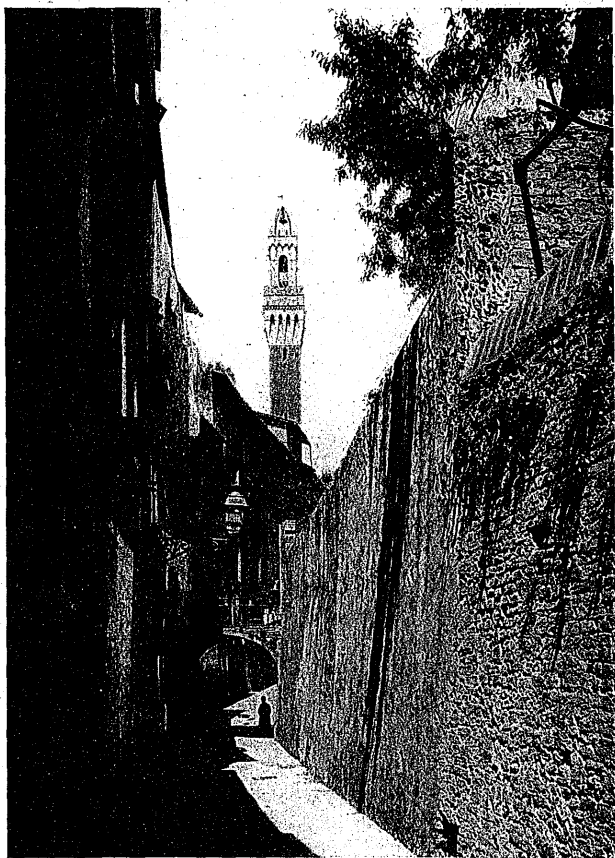


Photo. Alinari.

A STREET IN SIENA

pilgrimage; and Monna Lapa remembered the warning sent to her by our Lord through Catherine.

“The death-carts went from street to street, gathering up the dead; the priests who tended the dying and buried the victims, in many cases shared their fate.” Among the horrors of the plague Catherine moved fearless, like an Angel of Mercy, assisted nobly by the Mantellate and the members of other religious confraternities, notably that of the Ospedale di Sta Maria della Scala. “Never did she seem more admirable than now.” Wherever the pestilence raged most fiercely she was to be found, succouring the dying, performing the last offices for the dead, many of whom she buried with her own hands. Famine followed close on the heels of pestilence, so that it became difficult to buy the necessary food for the sick. A little band of Dominicans, headed by Fra Raimondo, who had “resolved to sacrifice his life for the salvation of souls,” and who knew that “our Lord Jesus Christ is more powerful than Galen,” heroically fought the plague. But both he and Fra Bartolommeo fell victims to it, and were miraculously healed by Catherine’s prayers. The illness of the former was sudden and severe, but the latter had been “long and grievously sick of the plague.” The account given by Fra Raimondo of the miracle wrought in his own case is one of the most vivid and beautiful stories in the *Legenda*.¹

Catherine also wrought at least two more such cures. One was that of the holy hermit Fra Santi, an old man known as “the Saint,” whom she caused to be carried from his cell outside Siena to the Casa della Misericordia, and in whose ear she whispered again and again: “Fear not, you will not die!”—finally commanding him in the Name of Christ to return to life. The other case was that of Messer Matteo, her friend, the Rector of the Miseri-

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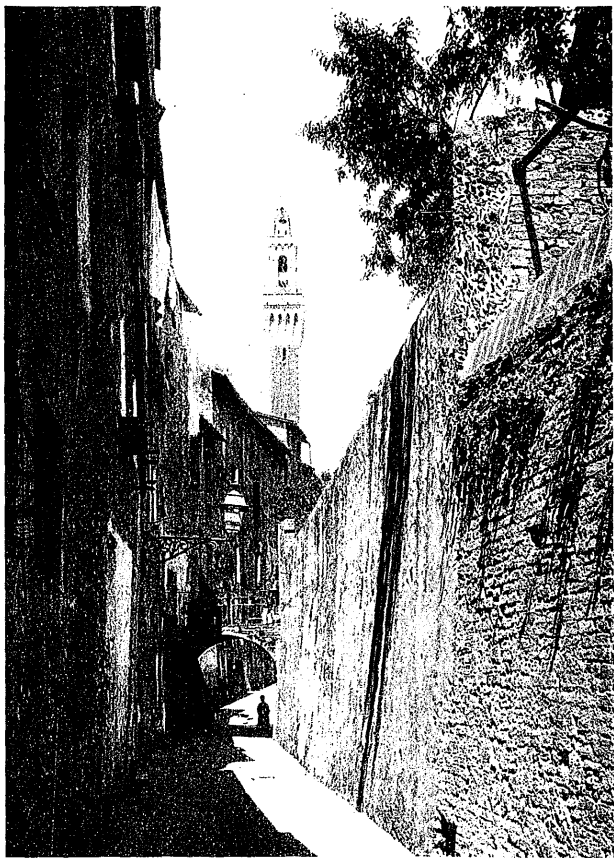


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cordia, who had been one of the most active of the heroic priests in Siena. To this good man, lying *in extremis* after terrible agony, Catherine entered, crying cheerfully : " Rise up, rise up, Ser Matteo ! This is not the time to be taking your ease in bed ! " Immediately the disease left him, and he who could so ill be spared at such a time arose whole and sound, to minister to others. " Those who dwelt in the house, pupils, priests, and more than twenty other persons," beheld this miracle. Messer Matteo became one of Catherine's staunchest champions, and—what is more—the faithful friend of her friends. Stefano Maconi, in particular, was deeply attached to the good old man.

Though it was not during the famine of 1374 that the following miracle took place, it may be related here. Catherine was staying with Alessia Saraceni, who had, on the death of her father-in-law, taken a house nearer to the Fullonica. The harvest of the previous year had been bad—owing to heavy rain at the time of ingathering, the grain had become musty, or, as the old English translation simply puts it, " styncking " ; and on the approach of the next harvest, which promised to be excellent, Alessia proposed to throw away the mouldy grain and buy fresh. Catherine, however, bade her make it into loaves for the poor. Alessia demurred, but Catherine offered to make the flour already in the house into bread, with her own hands, " for the poor of Jesus Christ." She mixed and kneaded the dough, handing the astonished Alessia loaf after loaf to be placed in the oven ; and when the bread was baked all those who ate it declared that never had they tasted any so sweet and good. Fra della Fonte and Fra Caffarini were among the Religious who came to inquire into this miracle. For Catherine had made four times the usual quantity of bread from the musty flour, and the supply lasted for several weeks. Pieces of it were kept " through devotion " for over twenty years. When Fra Raimondo became Catherine's confessor he asked her privately to tell him how this prodigy was wrought. Then she said that earnestly desiring to avoid waste, and intensely compassionate of the poor, she was already kneading the dough when our Lady, accompanied by a celestial

escort, appeared beside her, "deigning in her love and pity to knead the dough with her own hands," and miraculously multiplying the loaves which, as she made them, she handed one by one to Catherine, who passed them on to Alessia and her servant.¹

This prodigy is related here, though it happened not later than 1372, before Catherine met Fra Raimondo, because during the famine of 1374 it was renewed again



and again. "During the time of famine Catherine multiplied bread for the poor," says a young Dominican who now became her disciple. This was Fra Simone of Cortona, who had allied himself with his Superiors in visiting the sick and dying, regardless of danger; and who was by them rewarded with an introduction to Catherine.

¹ The kneading-trough shown in the illustration (of the early sixteenth century), is of exactly the shape and style of those which may still be found sometimes in remote villages in England; though their original purpose has been forgotten.

He became attached to Neri di Landoccio, whose temperament his own much resembled ; though in the young Friar melancholy often deepened into morbidity, and almost into despair. Catherine, who understood him perfectly, treated him with the greatest kindness ; seldom failing in her absence from Siena to send him some cheerful, reassuring messages of remembrance when writing to any friend at San Domenico.

The wonders wrought by Catherine during the plague had made a deep impression upon the nuns of a convent in the distant city of Pisa ; and these Religious now sent the Saint a pressing invitation to visit them. So earnest were they that they begged Messer Piero Gambacorti, the chief magistrate of the city, to request the favour of her presence there. But sickness prevented Catherine from leaving Siena. Worn out by her exertions during the plague, she fell ill in August ; and, praying for death, received on the Feast of the Assumption a gracious visit from our Lady, who told Catherine that her Divine Son wished her to live " a little longer," whereupon the sick girl recovered. But illness was not her only excuse. " I see," she wrote to Messer Piero, " that at the present time it would be an occasion of scandal."

The *Riformati* of Siena were then in an extremely difficult position—for Bernabo Visconti was seeking to draw all Italy into his quarrel with the Pope—and much disliked the thought of Catherine's absence, especially in a town so important as Pisa, the capital of the chief maritime republic in Italy, and still, in spite of many agitations, faithful to Gregory XI. Earnestly does the Saint implore the chief ruler of Pisa to remain constant to that allegiance, and to use his authority wisely. " I pray you, for the Love of Jesus Crucified, always to have your eyes fixed in the position you hold, upon the holy justice of God . . . Very willingly would I satisfy your desire, and that of the holy nuns who begged you to invite me, but just now I must ask you to excuse me . . . But I hope in the Love of God that if His Honour and the salvation of souls require it, He will permit me one day to make this journey peaceably . . . May Christ overwhelm you with His sweetest graces. I recommend

myself with tender affection to the Religious [who asked you to write]. Let them pray for me that God may make me humble and submissive to my Creator. Amen. Praised be Jesus Christ Crucified."

It was doubtless Fra Raimondo, who had lived there for over three years, and who had already written his Life of St. Agnes, who inspired Catherine with the wish to visit Montepulciano, twenty-four miles distant. Having obtained permission from her Superiors she set off for that "lofty city" with several of her companions, through some of the loveliest country in Tuscany. Like St. Francis of Assisi, Catherine was intensely sensitive to natural beauty. As we follow her wonderful career we watch her passing from city to city—each more beautiful than another. Her eyes throughout her life continually rested on some of the fairest, most romantic scenery in Italy and in France—Siena, Montepulciano—"the rosy queen of all this fair country . . . a city of the pure and aloof mountains";¹ Florence, with her unrivalled palaces and bridges, the pale shimmering splendour of her marble Duomo, and the fragile delicacy, the strong perfection, of Giotto's Lily Tower; Pisa, enthroned beside the sea; Lucca, which some call the fairest of them all; Genoa, the city of palaces; and a hundred picturesque lesser towns, a thousand panoramic landscapes painted against the faint snows of the Apennine peaks, in colours that are only found south of the Alps. And then in France—the magic beauty of the Riviera, the remote splendour of the ancient Roman cities threaded along the silver Rhone, like a string of broken beads, and Avignon the chief jewel of them all—to visualize all this helps one to understand how a soul like Catherine's beheld "in all things fair Him that is Most Fair." Her love of flowers—of all created inanimate objects the most perfect revelation of the Beauty of God—was very great. Every one of her biographers mentions it. "I remember," says Stefano Maconi, "how one day, when she saw flowers in a meadow, she said to us: 'Do you not perceive how everything created honours and praises God? Look at those scarlet flowers. They speak to us of the Sacred Wounds of Jesus Christ.'" "God

¹ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

took as much pains to form the insects and the flowers," she said again, "as He did to form the angels." All creation became to her a great Sacrament of God's love. So well was her devotion to flowers known that at Venice the great church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, of the Dominicans, where she was honoured even before her canonization, was beautifully decorated with them upon her Feast-day. Thus, in spite of her sufferings from weakness and ill-health on her frequent journeys, we may feel very sure that Catherine never failed to enjoy them.

On this, her first visit to Montepulciano, where she wished to venerate the incorrupt body of St. Agnes, she was joined the next day by her two confessors, who with all Catherine's companions and the entire convent of nuns, were witnesses of a miracle. As the Saint approached with reverence the shrine of St. Agnes, and knelt to kiss her foot, it was raised towards her lips. Regrettable as it is to admit it, a large number of those present murmured, saying that such a sign was the work of the devil. Fra Raimondo, who governed the monastery as Vicar, promptly assembled the nuns in chapter, and a conference, which had at least its amusing side, ensued, ending in the discomfiture of the disaffected. "My very dear Sister," said Raimondo, to one who "desired to explain that the intention of Blessed Agnes was not such as we believed it," "we do not question you concerning the intention of Blessed Agnes, for we are well aware that you are neither her secretary nor her confidante. We merely ask you whether you saw the foot rise of its own accord?" The nun being obliged to reply "Yes," Fra Raimondo imposed on her a severe penance for "all the discourses in which she had indulged."

A far more beautiful story is related of Catherine's second visit to Montepulciano. Lisa, her widowed sister-in-law, had returned to Siena and to the Fullonica, and Catherine accompanied her and two of her daughters, who were about to enter the novitiate of the Montepulciano convent. On this occasion Catherine knelt by the head of St. Agnes, whose glory, it had been revealed to her, she should share in Heaven. She laid her head for

a few moments on the silken covering which concealed the face of St. Agnes, and then, looking upward, said smiling: "Do you not see the gift that Heaven sends us?" whereupon those present, raising their eyes, "beheld a fine white manna falling like heavenly dew," so that Lisa filled her hands with it. This miracle, says Raimondo, was a renewal of a heavenly favour often granted to St. Agnes in her lifetime, so that those whom she directed, seeing her mantle white, wished to brush it off—an attention which the Saint refused, through humility.

It was on the way to Montepulciano, too, that Fra Tommaso della Fonte and another Friar, going from Siena to visit Fra Raimondo when he lived at the monastery of Sant' Agnese, were set upon by brigands, beaten, robbed, and threatened with death. At the moment of their utmost peril her confessor bethought him of Catherine, and begged her interiorly to intercede for them. At that moment the Saint, many miles away in Siena, said to her companions: "My Father Confessor is calling me; he is in great danger." She began to pray with all her strength on his behalf. Just as all hope seemed over the Friar's captors were touched with shame and pity. Not only did they release their prisoners, but restored to them their garments and horses, and even the money which they had stolen. Though Fra Raimondo had never then seen Catherine, we may be sure that this story, related an hour afterwards by the excited Friars, would have made a deep impression upon his serene and gentle spirit.

It was at Montepulciano that on the occasion of Catherine's first visit, Fra Raimondo's last doubts as to her sanctity were dispelled. Desirous to place the question beyond doubt, he contrived a test for her. He asked her to procure for him from her Divine Spouse, a full remission of all his sins—"a Bull drawn up after the manner of the Court of Rome." Next day he was overwhelmed by such bitter and passionate contrition that he said to his spiritual daughter: "Is this the Bull I asked for?" To which she replied: "It is even so. Forget not the benefits of God." Once more, it was at Montepulciano that that most tremendous and awe-inspiring

event took place when, as Catherine lay sick upon her couch, having sent for Fra Raimondo "to communicate to him certain great spiritual revelations," he gazed at her, tempted to say in his heart: "Can all this that she says be true?" Then she looked up at him, not the pale and wasted countenance of Catherine, but the Divine Face of the Man of Sorrows, who fixed His eyes upon him "with a marvellous dreadful look." And Fra Raimondo, seeing that Face, and for a time being able to see nothing else, was in mortal fear, and holding up his hands cried in terror: "O Lord, Who is this that looketh so upon me?" "It is HE THAT IS," said the voice of Catherine; "and with that she returned to her own form."

The *contado* of Siena is fragrant with memories of Catherine, which are still cherished in many a village of the neighbourhood, especially at Rocco a Pili, where Lisa had inherited a little *villino*, and where she and her friend spent many happy days. Here, while praying before receiving Holy Communion, Catherine once more felt that mysterious cleansing rain of Blood and Fire descending upon her soul. But from the beginning of 1374 she was no longer her own. The desire for her presence in Siena amounted to jealousy if she visited another town; and once, when she was at Montepulciano we find one of her earliest disciples, Tommaso di Guelfaccio, sent after her with an urgent message from the *Riformati*, begging her immediate return to Siena. Civic difficulties had arisen. The advice of the *Beata Popolana* was needed.

"You desire my return," she wrote in reply, "and you ask for the best means of arriving at a settled peace. I am incapable of the least thing myself, but I pray that the work of God may be done, and I bow my head in submission whenever the Holy Spirit wills me to obey your orders and return to you—for I must ever set the work of God above that of men. At present I do not see how I can possibly return, for I am arranging an important matter for the Convent of St. Agnes; and I am staying with the sons of Messer Spinello in order to bring about the reconciliation of Lorenzo's sons . . . As soon as God permits, I will return . . . Remain in the holy and sweet Love of God. Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love."

The last four words are Catherine's sign-manual, with which all her letters concluded. Everywhere she was in request as a peacemaker. One such case of reconciliation, among a number which must regretfully be passed over, was that of an important Sienese, Nanni di Ser Vanni, a man who was dreaded alike by the law-abiding and the wicked, on account of his double-dealing. Involved in countless crimes, he was too clever to allow any to be traced to him. To judge from the *Legenda*, he was, in fact, what would now be called a blackmailer. He carefully avoided Catherine, having no desire to follow the examples of Malavolti, Saraceni, and others, but was finally persuaded by the English Hermit, Father William Flete, to pay her a visit. Arrived at her cell, he found the Saint absent; but Fra Raimondo was waiting for her, and detained Nanni with great difficulty until Catherine's return. After a short conversation in Raimondo's presence, the man flung himself in tears at her feet, promising to be reconciled to his enemies, and to set himself to bring about peace in the city—which he had, on his own confession, hitherto prevented; asking pardon of God for his sins; and committing himself and all his affairs, like a true son of Siena, into the hands of our Blessed Lady. A few days later he was arrested, and thrown into prison. Fra Raimondo, greatly distressed, feared that he would be too discouraged to persevere, since "now that he had turned to God, evil had fallen upon him." But Catherine was confident and cheerful. "Fear not, he will not despair," she said to her confessor; and she was right, for Nanni was released on payment of a fine, and the mischance had so increased his very genuine contrition that he made a valuable present to Catherine. This was the ancient castle of Belcaro, a few miles from Siena, situated in lovely country, but difficult of access. Later on St. Catherine founded a convent here, by special permission of Pope Gregory XI, in honour of Our Lady of the Angels.

At the close of the year 1374 came to Siena one of the most notable ecclesiastics of the day, the holy and learned Alfonso da Vadaterra, formerly Bishop of Jaen, a See which he had renounced to enter the Order of Augustinian Hermits. He had been confessor to St. Bridget (who died

in July, 1373), the only woman whose world-career can be compared to that of Catherine, and whose daughter, St. Catherine of Sweden, was soon to be closely associated with her namesake of Siena—the purity of snow with that of cleansing flame. Vadaterra, a Spaniard of Sienese descent, had come from Avignon to bestow the Papal Blessing upon Catherine, and to beg her to use her increasing influence on behalf of Gregory XI.

“My dearest and best-beloved Fathers and dearest Brothers in the most Precious and Generous Blood,” writes Catherine to Fra Bartolommeo and Fra Tommaso Caffarini, now at Pisa: “I announce to you that the Pope has sent here one of his Vicars, the spiritual father of that Countess who died at Rome; he who for love of perfection refused to be made a bishop. He came to me from the Holy Father, bidding me pray specially for him and for Holy Church; and in token of his mission he brought me a plenary indulgence. Rejoice then and be glad because the Holy Father has begun to concern himself with the honour of God and of Holy Church . . . I have written to the Holy Father,¹ and have besought him for love of the most Sweet Blood to allow us to deliver up our bodies to all sorts of torments. Pray to the Eternal and Sovereign Truth, that, if it be in accordance with His Will, His Mercy will vouchsafe to grant this grace to us and to you, that together we may give our lives for Him.” The bearer of this letter—which was evidently dictated to Alessia, from whom there is a loving message towards the close, and a little friendly salutation: “Alessia the negligent wishes she could wrap herself up in this letter and come and see you”—was a young man who was on his way to Avignon to attempt to persuade the Pope to allow him and other seculars to join the Crusade. This had been proclaimed nearly two years earlier, but so far nothing had been done.

In the words just quoted we see the foreshadowing of one of Catherine's greatest hopes and desires. But Raimondo contradicts the statement made by many of her contemporaries, that she predicted a general Crusade of Christians, which she and her disciples should follow to

¹ This letter has been lost.

the Holy Land. He explains that she had always desired a Crusade, and done her best to promote it—seeing in it the double purpose of uniting divided Christendom, and of driving out the Turk. Gregory XI, however, held the view that the Christian nations must be reconciled before any special attempt was made to promote the already proclaimed Crusade—a task so evidently hopeless that the stoutest heart must have quailed before it. The pressing forward of the Crusade was indeed Catherine's chief object in going to Avignon (1376); and Raimondo relates a conversation between the Holy Father and St. Catherine at which he acted as interpreter—the French Pope speaking Latin, and Catherine Tuscan—but that the Saint's endeavours to alter Pope Gregory's opinion were in vain. He declares very forcibly that he had never heard Catherine prophesy that such a Crusade would take place. "I always found her, on the contrary, very reserved about it; never determining an epoch, but resigning the whole matter to Divine Providence." Caffarini tells us she spared "neither letters, nor prayers, nor words to promote it . . . She hoped thereby to be able to visit our Saviour's Tomb." This question of the Crusade colours the rest of Catherine's life, as can best be seen by studying her letters, nearly 400 of which, either in whole or part, have been preserved to us. As we shall see, she never gave up hope of it entirely, even in the dark days of the Great Schism, of the terror of which she was to be a witness during the last two years of her earthly life.

(2)

CATHERINE'S Dominican friends at Pisa had so spread her fame in that city that a fresh and more pressing invitation was sent to her at the end of 1374, and this time she accepted it. Her party included Lisa, Alessia, and several other Mantellate, besides Lapa, who refused to be separated from her daughter. They were all in charge of Fra Raimondo, Fra Bartolommeo—who had evidently just returned to Siena—and Fra

Tommaso della Fonte. These three priests intended to act as confessors to those souls whom Catherine hoped to gain for God in Pisa. They reached that city in February, 1375, and were received by the citizens, with the Archbishop at their head, with great devotion and rejoicing.

There is no Italian city quite like Pisa. Its beautiful Duomo, its Baptistery, its marvellous Leaning Tower, its Campo Santo filled with earth from Palestine, starry in spring with those beautiful white flowers which are said to have been introduced into Europe by pious Crusaders in the earth brought from the Holy Land, and which are called in England "Stars of Bethlehem"—all these things must have filled Catherine's beauty-loving soul with joy. Even the camels—which were already naturalized there—would speak to her of the East, and remind her of the country of the Crusade, and Jerusalem, the goal of her hopes. But she had not crossed Tuscany to see these things. She had come to Pisa because she could thus best fulfil Pope Gregory's recently expressed desire. Her mission was semi-official and important; and if we would grasp its meaning, and that of those which she subsequently undertook to other Tuscan cities, we must glance for a moment at the state of Italian politics at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the *Quattrocento*.

We have already said that Bernabo Visconti was the human instrument which, though perhaps indirectly, started the political missions of St. Catherine. This man was now endeavouring to gain the Tuscan republics to his cause against the League raised against him by Gregory XI. He had made overtures to all, but so far without success. We must, however, be careful to remember in speaking of the "allegiance" of certain cities or communes to the Pope, that no question of Faith, or indeed of religion, is involved. Wicked as many of her rulers were, Italy, in the fourteenth century, was at least Catholic. Bernabo himself, after a long life of crime, was to die in 1385, truly penitent, murmuring in his agony: "*Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, ne despicias.*" The question of adherence to the Pope was simply one of the Pontiff's temporal authority, and entirely political; though, as in

the sad case of Florence, excommunication was often launched against the rebellious cities.

The alliance of the five Tuscan Republics was most important just now to Bernabo. Between the Visconti's ravaged domains in Lombardy and the Emperor's territory in the south of Italy—Naples and Sicily—lay Pisa, Lucca, Florence, Siena, and Arezzo. Of these Pisa was the most important, from the fact of its sea-power. South of Tuscany again lay the States of the Church—the Patrimony of Peter. Protected as these were in the south by Naples, Bernabo could do very little harm if Tuscany did not take his part; or at least allow the passage of his troops. Hence he was sparing no pains to gain them; hence his message to Catherine of Siena at the close of 1373.

Such, in a nutshell, was the general position of affairs. But things were not so simple as they looked. Bernabo's great object, of course, was to keep the Holy Father at Avignon and out of Rome. This was also the aim of certain traitors in the Pope's own service, such as Cardinal de Noëlle, Papal Legate in Bologna, the Vicar of the Papal States; and the Legate in Perugia, the infamous Gerard du Puy. Abbot of Marmoutier, who was created Cardinal at the close of 1375. St. Bridget had uttered in the plainest terms her opinion of this prelate, with whom she had been brought much into contact; and St. Catherine was soon to be able to confirm her burning words. He was one of the worst of "the rapacious wolves in sheep's clothing" to whom Gregory XI entrusted the administration of the Patrimony of St. Peter. It suited this man, and others like him, that the Papal Court should remain on the other side of the Alps. Above all, it suited him, and the other French Cardinals, that a French Pope should rule in France. Therefore du Puy and his fellows played into the hands of Visconti, who was the chief obstacle to the Pope's return. It will thus be clear that the primary cause of all the political unrest at this time was Bernabo himself, whose character has already been described. Such then was the state of Italy—a network of small alliances, of plots and counter-plots, of the schemes of highly-placed individuals only too ready to sell

themselves to the highest bidder—when St. Catherine came to Pisa.

Her object, of course, was to induce the Pisans to remain faithful to the allegiance of the Pope, and to give no heed to Bernabo's wooing. And there can be no doubt at all that her influence did keep that most important Tuscan republic loyal to Gregory XI for a long time; whilst the moral and political atmosphere was so disturbed that the adherence of many a hitherto-devoted city hung in the balance. It is necessary thus to draw out one or two of the principal threads from this many-coloured tangle of knotty and intricate politics if we are to follow St. Catherine intelligently for the next two years; but there are several others of equal interest of which space forbids the extrication. It may be added that though Catherine went to Pisa in furtherance of the Pope's wish, she did not go by his express command, but by interior revelation of our Lord Himself.

"On our arrival at Pisa," says Fra Raimondo, "Catherine was hospitably received at the house of a citizen named Gherardo Buonconti. Her host brought her one day a young man of some twenty years . . . requesting her to be so good as to pray for his restoration to health." For eighteen months he had suffered from violent attacks of fever, which had brought him to the brink of the grave. "Catherine, moved with pity, inquired of the youth how long it was since he had been to confession?" On his replying: "Several years," she bade him purify his soul at once in the Precious Blood, and cleanse it from the corruption of sin which had poisoned his body. Fra Tommaso della Fonte at once confessed the young man. When he returned to Catherine, she placed her hand on his shoulder, saying kindly: "Go, my son, in the Peace of Christ. It is my will you should have this fever no more." The youth departed, cured, and published the miracle throughout the city. "When I was passing through Pisa several years later," adds Raimondo, "he visited me, and it was with difficulty I recognized him, so robust and manly was he in health and bearing."

This miracle and others brought men and women flocking to Buonconti's house. The greatest devotion was

shown to the Saint—indeed it was at Pisa that Fra Raimondo, when reproaching Catherine for allowing her hand to be kissed, first learnt of her miraculous power of perceiving souls, and consequently paying little attention to bodily actions. It was at Pisa, too, that St. Catherine, like St. Francis and many other Saints—notably St. Catherine de' Ricci—received the Stigmata of her Crucified Lord. The wonderful event occurred in the little Church of Sta Cristina, on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, 1375. Fra Raimondo had said Mass, and given Catherine Holy Communion. “She remained afterwards a long time in ecstasy . . . her soul, which sighed after its Creator, separating itself as far as possible from the body. We waited (he says) until she had resumed her senses, in order to receive spiritual consolation, when on a sudden we saw her body that was prostrate on the ground, rise a little, kneel, and extend its hands and arms. Her countenance was radiant. She remained a long time motionless, with her eyes closed. Then, as though she had received a mortal wound we saw her suddenly fall, and after a few minutes she came to her senses.” Shortly afterwards she told Raimondo what he had already suspected. In answer to his question she said: “I saw my Crucified Lord, Who descended upon me with a great light, and the effort of my soul to go forth and meet its Creator caused my body to rise from the ground. Then, from the openings of the Five Sacred Wounds of Christ, five rays of blood-red light struck my hands, my feet, my heart. Understanding this mystery I cried out: ‘Ah, my Lord and God! I pray Thee that these wounds may not appear outwardly in my flesh!’ Whilst yet I spoke the rays became brilliant, and rested like purest light upon those five parts of my body.” The ray of light from the Divine Heart was deflected, she told Raimondo, to her left side; and in all her wounds she felt “so grievous a pain” that without a miracle she could not live long in such agony.

The Little Company betook itself to prayer. For a week Catherine lay almost as one dead on her bed in Buonconti's house, while intensely pathetic supplications went up that she might be spared. “Take compassion on

us," implored her friends of the Saint ; " your recompense is secure, but we are too weak to be left to battle with the fury of the waves alone ! " Sudden strength was restored to her after Holy Communion on Passion Sunday, " to the great regret of her soul." Henceforth the Sacred Stigmata, invisible during life but visible after Catherine's death, caused her increase of physical strength.¹



It was doubtless during this week that Fra Raimondo, greatly grieved at Catherine's weakness and continual fainting-fits, and knowing that she could swallow no food (not even cold water if a piece of sugar was put into it, for this he had tried)—bethought him of bathing her wrists

¹ The hand of St. Catherine, which forms one of the chief treasures of the wonderful collection of relics preserved at the Convent of SS. Domenico e Sisto at Rome (where is also part of the skull of St. Dominic, and a bone of the arm of St. Thomas Aquinas)—and which the present writer was allowed closely to examine in 1911 by special permission of the Most Reverend Master-General—shows unmistakable traces of the Stigma. See Drane, *op. cit.*, pp. 269, 270.

and temples with a certain kind of wine, useful in such cases, which the old English legend calls "vernage." He consulted with Gherardo, and a neighbour who had a cask of vernage was applied to. But the cask had run dry, said the neighbour, and in proof thereof he drew out the spigot, when lo! a flood of wine rushed out "and moistened all the surrounding ground." Everyone in the house was closely questioned, but each denied that he had put anything into the cask. A bottle of the marvellous wine was brought back, "and Catherine's numerous spiritual children rejoiced in the Lord." The sequel to this story is interesting. The Apostolic Nuncio had just arrived in Pisa, and Catherine went to visit him. All the city was in commotion—men left their work to gaze on one who, though drinking no wine herself, had yet miraculously filled a cask with vernage! Catherine, much distressed, earnestly prayed to our Lord that the flow of wine might cease "in such a manner as to destroy this report and unseemly excitement." Her prayer was answered. There now remained only a thick sediment in the cask, so that "those who went to obtain wine were forced to be silent on the matter."

Some twenty miles from Livorno (Leghorn), the port of Pisa, lies the precipitous and rocky island of Gorgona. Dom Bartolommeo Serafini, the Prior of the Carthusian monastery established there, had long desired to see Catherine of Siena, of whose marvellous life and deeds he had heard much, and he now invited her to spend a day with her friends in his solitude. So insistent was he that Catherine at last agreed. It was on the occasion of the short voyage from Livorno that Catherine first saw the sea. The party was met on arrival by the Prior and monks of the Certosa, Catherine and the rest of the women being lodged about a mile from the monastery, to which the rest returned with the Carthusians. Early next morning the good Prior led all his monks to the house of their visitors, where Dom Bartolommeo begged Catherine to address his sons. At first she refused, but overcome by the general entreaty "she began to speak as the Holy Ghost inspired her," on the subject of Temptation and Victory, so that all her audience was filled with amazement. The Prior

remarked to Fra Raimondo that if Catherine had heard the confessions of all the brethren she could not have said anything more to the point. "She neglected nothing they needed, and did not utter a useless word. It is evident that she possesses the gift of prophecy, and that the Holy Ghost speaks through her mouth." He declared further that at the moment of leaving the island, Catherine said to him privately: "Father Prior, watch over your flock, for I warn you that the enemy is seeking to produce scandal in the monastery. But fear not, for he will not prevail." This prophecy was fulfilled a few days later by the rebellion and attempted suicide of a young monk to whom a permission had been refused; and who was brought to a sense of his fault when the cloak "which Catherine had left as a remembrance" with Dom Bartolommeo when she quitted Gorgona was brought and laid in his arms. "My son," said the Prior, "recommend yourself to St. Catherine!" "Truly she is praying for me now," replied the young monk; "for without her prayers I had been lost."

The Prior relates also that on Catherine's return to the mainland the monks who brought the party over to Livorno begged her blessing before returning to their island. She bade them not to fear if during their crossing they should be in peril, for the Lord would be with them. As they neared Gorgona a sudden storm arose, the barque actually foundered on a rock, and one of them was swept overboard. But so great was their faith in the efficacy of her prayer that they had no fear; and soon they all reached the land safely, being carried thither off the reef by the waves.

One more interesting fact is related by Dom Bartolommeo. Being at Pisa shortly after Catherine's departure (September, 1375), he asked one possessed of the devil: "Is that Saint in Siena so holy as people say?" "Far more so," replied the demoniac. Thus even the evil spirits bore witness to her.

Though we have dwelt rather on the personal than the political mission of Catherine in Pisa—her work for souls and the prodigies which accompanied it—it must not be supposed she had lost sight of her chief purpose. Pisa was

definitely gained to the Holy See, for a time at least ; and Catherine's influence and reputation for wisdom increased daily with Messer Piero Gambacorti and his colleagues—the rulers of the city. But she bestowed a large part of her time and energies to promoting the Crusade ; writing to Queen Giovanna of Naples, of whom we shall hear more ; to Queen Elizabeth, mother of King Louis of Hungary, urging her to influence her son to take up arms for the Church. Indeed, her stay at Pisa is almost covered by the letters she dictated on this subject to rulers and princes, to Religious and statesmen, begging them to do all in their power to help forward the holy enterprise. As we know, this Crusade never materialized, and this was to be one of the great disappointments of Catherine's last days.

In the midst of all these activities occurred an event which was to plunge the whole of Christendom into war. "On June 7th a courier rode into Pisa, bearing an olive-branch from Cardinal de Noëlle, the Papal Vicar, with the tidings that he had concluded at Bologna a truce for a year with Bernabo Visconti." This step was regarded with keen suspicion by Florence, the largest of the five republics, as it was believed to be the first move in a plot to subjugate the whole of Tuscany. The Florentines had for some time wished to make a League of the five republics, against the aggressions of the cruel and despotic Papal Legates. But the other four, so far, had refused, on the ground that they could not enter any League opposed to the Holy See. Now, however, an element of real danger was introduced. A formidable band of free-lances, hitherto in the pay of Gregory XI against Visconti, was dismissed by the Pope, and encamped close to Florentine territory. This was in consequence of the Signoria of Florence informing Cardinal de Noëlle that it was impossible to lend him the large sum of money he asked to hire these mercenaries, and thus prevent them from turning their arms against Tuscany.

Of the many letters written by Catherine from Pisa the most interesting is perhaps that addressed to the captain of this band, Sir John Hawkwood, an Englishman. This man had identified himself with the detestable mediæval

system of organized brigandage—for the cosmopolitan troops of mercenaries who ravaged Italy, destroying what they could not carry away, were nothing but brigands. A modern French historian, writing of the principal causes of the terrible abuses under which Christendom groaned at this time, declares the first to have been the continual wars which laid waste the greater part of Europe. Robber chiefs, always on the scent of prey and spoil, had for a century been the terror, as well as the disgrace, of Christian kingdoms. Bands of these *condottieri*, without flag or nationality, without faith or pity, roamed the country, doing exactly what they chose. Rival kings engaged them. They were in the pay of the highest bidder for their services. They were mercenaries, reminding us of the pirates who, from the sixteenth century onwards, swept the shores of Mexico and Central America. They were all-powerful because everyone feared to offend them, and no ruler could afford to destroy them. Where they had passed peasants were driven from the land, and all was left desolate. They held the balance of power, and were played off by one State against another. They destroyed countless great Abbeys and Religious Houses, as is shown by the Bulls of Innocent VI and Urban V. Bishops were driven from their Sees, and forced to take refuge at Avignon, or Paris. The *condottieri* respected, feared, loved nothing. The faithful feared to enter the church doors; many Cathedral Chapters were starving on account of their wholesale robberies. "Everywhere holiness suffered an eclipse; the moral ruins left by the brigands were worse than the material."

Catherine's letter was as follows:

"In the Name of Jesus Crucified and of Sweet Mary.

"Dearest and well-beloved brothers in Christ Jesu, I, Catherine, the servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His Precious Blood with the desire of seeing you true sons and knights of Christ, so that if needs be you may desire to give your lives a thousand times for this good, sweet Jesus, Who has redeemed us from all the iniquities we have committed against our Saviour.

"O dearest and sweet brothers in Christ Jesus, you will do well to enter into yourselves for a little space, and consider the pains and torments you have endured in the service and pay of the devil. My soul longs that you should now be changed, and should enrol yourselves under the Cross of Jesus Crucified, you and all your companions, to form a Company of Christ, and to march against the infidel dogs who possess the Holy Places where the Most Sweet Supreme Truth has lived, and has suffered torments and death for us. I beseech you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, since God and the Holy Father have ordained an expedition against these infidels, and since you so dearly love war and fighting, to fight no more against Christians, for this offends God; but to march against their enemies. Is it not a cruel thing that we who are Christians, members of the Body of Holy Church, should fight against one another? Let us do it no more, but set off with holy zeal, and have no other thought but [for God's glory].

"I am much astonished that you who, as I heard, had promised to go and die for Christ in the Holy Crusade, now wish to make war here. This is no good preparation for what God requires of you when He calls you to a place so holy and worshipful [as Jerusalem]. It seems to me that you ought now to prepare yourselves for this by the practice of virtue, until the moment when you and your friends may go and die for Christ. Thus will you show that you are a true and glorious knight. Fra Raimondo, my Father and my Son, will bring you this letter. Trust confidently in all he says to you, for he is a true and faithful servant of God, and will never counsel or tell you anything that is not for His Honour, nor for the salvation and glory of your soul. I close, praying you, my dearest brother, to remember that time is short. Remain in the sweet and holy Love of God.

"Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love.

"CATHERINE, a useless servant."

This admirably courageous letter, so characteristic of the writer, who always believed the best of everybody, was not as entirely fruitless as those acquainted with the methods of the *condottieri* might suppose. Hawkwood

was then probably at the very gates of Pisa. Cardinal de Noëlle, in declaring his inability to pay off the troops unless assisted by Florence—a statement which was probably true—had at the same time refused any longer to allow grain to pass from the Papal States to Tuscany. In spite of the Legate's declaration that there was now scarcely sufficient grain in the Romagna to suffice for the population, this was looked upon as an unfriendly act. The Florentines, who had ever leant to the side of Bernabo, made it a pretext for an open rupture with the Holy See. In spite of an affectionate letter from Gregory XI to the Signoria of Florence, urging them to come to terms with de Noëlle, they came to terms instead with Sir John Hawkwood himself, a fortnight after peace had been declared between the Pontiff and Visconti—June 21st, 1375. The feeling against de Noëlle ran very high in the city; and the Florentines were enraged when a plot—said to have been revealed by Hawkwood—was disclosed. It was said that Prato, half-way between Florence and Pistoia, was to be betrayed to the Papal Legate; and the supposed conspirators, one of whom was a priest, were put to death in the streets of Florence with indescribable tortures. This, of course, put peace with the Holy See entirely out of the question. A month later the Florentines, with remarkable political astuteness, made a five years' truce with Bernabo Visconti! This "morally indefensible" step brought matters to a crisis, and open war between Florence and the Pope was now inevitable. From this action ensued both St. Catherine's Peace Missions to Florence.

A government of eight councillors, known as the "Eight of War," was formed to direct the military department; and to the army which was rapidly raised colours were presented, bearing in golden letters the legend: "*Libertas*." Hawkwood, who naturally cared for none of these things except as far as his own interests were concerned, having extorted from Florence all the money it seemed possible at that time to obtain, made a tour of the other Tuscan Republics, with a similar laudable purpose. He came first to Pisa, and it was while his band was encamped without the walls that Catherine wrote to this

man, the terror of Italy, more irresponsible than Bernabo Visconti himself, the letter already quoted.

Fra Raimondo returned safely from the brigand's camp, bearing the signed and sealed promise of the entire band to take part in the Crusade as soon as it was ready to start. So deeply touched had they all been by St. Catherine's letter that they had all sworn to this on the Blessed Sacrament; and Fra Raimondo's earnest words, always simple and direct, had gone to the hearts of these mediæval cut-throats. Alas! the Crusade was never "ready to start!" Who can say what might have been the result of such an expedition had Christendom then been ruled by a St. Pius V—had the temporal princes been less slack, less stupid, less self-indulgent?

Meantime the situation at Pisa was delicate in the extreme. Piero Gambacorti, loyal son of the Church as he was, was yet well aware of the danger to the commune if Pisa became isolated, and left to the tender mercies of Bernabo by refusing to join Florence. Yet he most earnestly desired to avoid all hostilities with the Holy See, and long and critical were his discussions with his brother-magistrates, and with St. Catherine. Thanks to her Pisa was delivered, at least for a time, from the menace of Sir John Hawkwood. This probably was a strong determining factor in deciding him to follow the Saint's advice, and to attempt that most difficult policy of all—neutrality.

It was not until she was well satisfied on this head that Catherine left Pisa. Siena stood firm for the Pope, but Lucca, from her geographical position, was in almost as difficult a situation as Pisa. Arezzo, the smallest of the five republics, was wholly under Florentine influence. Affairs were still critical when, in September, 1375, St. Catherine set out for Siena, with which city she had been in constant correspondence since her departure in January. She had been forced to allay certain murmurings amongst her friends there as to her imaginary preference for her new acquaintances at Pisa. Even Messer Matteo, of the Misericordia, had taken part in this agitation, and St. Catherine's letter to him on the subject is full of vigour and sensible advice. She suffered almost as

much from the jealousy of her friends as from her enemies!

But though Siena was always first in Catherine's heart she left behind her in Pisa two souls bound to her own by ties of very tender and holy friendship. One was a young girl, Thora, the daughter of Messer Piero, who is now venerated as Blessed Clara Gambacorti, the reformer of the Dominican nuns of the Second Order. The other was a widow, known to us as Blessed Mary Mancini, who, like Catherine, was a Mantellata, and in whose company the Saint had received many Divine favours.

Catherine's stay in Siena was short, for a few days after her return she received a message from Pope Gregory XI, bidding her hasten to Lucca.

(3)

ST. CATHERINE travelled to Lucca by way of Pisa, in September, 1375. The beautiful city, enshrined in its olive-groves, opened its arms, like Pisa, to the Ambassador of Peace. In no place the Saint visited was there more personal interest shown in her. Avignon was to be critical, Florence sometimes actively hostile, but in Lucca Catherine entered straight into the hearts of a number of eager and enthusiastic women who not only venerated her, but loved her, and that so tenderly that after her departure we shall find her writing to Madonna Mellina Balbani, her hostess, a vigorous letter presently to be quoted. But her stay in Lucca was short—probably not more than a month, and she left as soon as she considered her commission from the Holy Father was accomplished, and that the rulers of Lucca were firmly established in their allegiance to the Holy Father—an allegiance which was becoming more dangerous and difficult every week, for the political situation was developing rapidly.

We have very few details as to St. Catherine's stay in Lucca. We know, however, that besides her new friends, she was surrounded by a crowd of devout persons, chiefly women, who hung upon her words, and who beheld with

awe and wonder the Saint's ecstasies in the Dominican Church of San Romano, where her body was frequently raised from the ground, "remaining so for a long time, being supported as it were by an invisible hand." This reverence of the Lucchesi was greatly increased by an event which took place while Catherine was so ill she was unable to rise from her bed. The priest who had been asked to bring her Holy Communion, seeking to test her holiness in a manner both daring and sacrilegious, brought her an unconsecrated host. On his arrival the Saint remained motionless, refusing to join in the adoration of those present. Then he even ventured to rebuke her for her lack of reverence. Sternly she turned to him, asking if he was not ashamed to bring to her a piece of unconsecrated bread, by which indeed he had caused all those assembled to commit idolatry? The priest went away humbled and remorseful, but filled with profound veneration for one who had been enabled by God to detect his sinful act. Caffarini, who, with Neri di Landoccio, was at Lucca in Catherine's company, also relates a miracle which occurred when the Saint, returning home from a work of mercy, and overtaken by a violent storm of rain which filled the streets with water, nevertheless arrived at Madonna Mellina's house with her clothes quite dry—a story which carries us back to a similar miracle wrought at Brive by St. Antony of Padua, a century and a half earlier.

Meanwhile, Florence, now seriously anxious as to the outcome of her rebellion, was moving heaven and earth to promote the League of the Tuscan Republics against the Pope, which in two cases St. Catherine had successfully prevented. That the Florentine position was serious is proved by the fact that realizing that the formation of this League was unlikely, and that Visconti's alliance alone was by no means likely to sway the balance in favour of Florence, more especially as Sir John Hawkwood was now once more definitely leagued with the Pope, the Signoria of Florence, in October, 1375, actively fomented a rebellion throughout the Patrimony. "Its army entered the States of the Church, proclaiming that the Florentines demanded nothing for themselves; that not only would they make

no conquests, but would accept dominion over no people who might offer themselves : they were desirous only of universal liberty.”¹ The Papal cities, groaning under the yoke of their brutal French rulers, were not slow to respond. Within two months Umbria and all the Papal States were furiously in revolt. Perugia, Viterbo, Gubbio, Forli, and many other towns declared themselves for freedom and for Florence ! “ In ten days more than eighty cities . . . had been lost to the Church.” One object of the Florentines in this desperate and unjustifiable move was to prevent the long-desired return of Pope Gregory XI to Rome—an event of which the Pontiff had frequently spoken. Rome, which passionately wished for the presence of the Pope, alone, with Orvieto and the port of Ancona, remained loyal to him. The movement was one of the most critical in the history of the Church ; and the greater the triumph of the Florentines the more difficult it became for Pisa and Lucca to hold out against their renewed invitations to join the Tuscan League, which Siena accepted in November, 1375.

St. Catherine came back to Pisa, probably in October, hoping to return speedily to Siena. In this hope, however, she was disappointed, for we find her writing to Fra Tommaso della Fonte in the latter city, saying that the Archbishop had applied to the Master-General for permission to retain her for a time in Pisa—another proof of the regard in which Catherine was held by those in high places. It was at Pisa she heard of the fall of the great Papal cities. Raimondo himself, with a certain Fra Piero di Velletri, went to her to announce the defection of Viterbo. At first she wept with them, but presently, seeing them infinitely cast down, she advised them not to think too much of this blow, for it was but “ milk and honey ” to that which would follow. Such consolation scarcely allayed the Friars’ fears, and Fra Raimondo inquired what disaster could possibly be greater than that of seeing Christians, fearless of censures, openly separating from the Unity of the Church ? “ Will the next step be to deny our Lord Himself ? ” Then she said solemnly : “ Now you see laymen behaving thus, but before long you

¹ Sismondi, *History of the Tuscan Republics*, ch. viii.

will see that the clergy will do likewise." And to Raimondo's bitter cry: "Will the clergy also rebel against the Sovereign Pontiff?" she continued: "When the Holy Father attempts to reform their morals the clergy will make a grievous scandal. They will ravage and divide the Church of Christ as if they were heretics." Fra Raimondo, appalled by these words, asked again: "Mother, will a new heresy arise?" To which in reply Catherine prophesied the Great Schism. "It will not be an actual heresy," she said; "but it will divide the Church and all Christendom. Arm yourself therefore with patience, for in your own person you will witness all these calamities."

As will appear, it was the drastic reforms urged by Urban VI—tactlessly, it must be admitted—which moved the disaffected Cardinals to Schism in 1378.

Shortly after her arrival at Pisa St. Catherine dictated the following letter to Mellina Balbani, whose affection for her was evidently greatly wanting in detachment! Catherine's letter is too long to be quoted in full, but after speaking of the true and generous Love of God, to which all real love must be conformed, she says: "Thus I do not want you to cherish any affection for me, or for any human being, that is not founded on God. I say this because I see from your letter that you have suffered from my absence, and I entreat you to follow the example of the Supreme Truth, Whom Love of His Mother and His disciples did not prevent from seeking the shameful death of the Cross. He left our Lady and the disciples, dearly as He loved them, for the honour of God and the salvation of the world. The Apostles also were scattered abroad because they did not consider themselves. They disregarded their own feelings for the sake of the praise and glory of God; and nourished and satisfied their longing with work for souls. Certainly in their time of sorrow they would gladly have remained with the Holy Mother, whom they so dearly loved; but they left her, because they did not love God, nor their neighbour, nor themselves, selfishly . . . It is thus you must love yourself and others. Think only how to serve God and how to help your neighbour. If you feel sad when you are parted from

those you love, do not be cast down. Your love must be founded on the honour of God, and concern itself rather with the salvation of souls than with yourself. Cease to sorrow for my departure, for it will only be a hindrance to your life in Jesus Crucified, and to your resemblance to Him. God has given generously; He asks generosity from us . . . This sweet and glorious affection which I desire for you never divides, but unites. It is like the mortar used by a master-workman who builds a wall with many stones. These stones can be called a wall when the mortar binds them; but without it they would fall, and be broken and separated . . . The Bond of Divine Charity is not a bond, because it becomes one thing with that to which it is united, like a log placed in the fire, which presently becomes fire itself. Would you say then that it is still wood? Has it not become one with the fire? . . . Thus I tell you that God will have no bonds, and that all love which is not founded on the Divine Love will not endure . . . Indeed I am sorry for you, and I will tell you the remedy for your trouble: it is to give your whole heart to God. And if you wish to love me too, unworthy as I am, I will tell you where you may find me, so that you may never stay away from the Perfect Love. Go to the sweet, adorable Crucifix, with the tender love of St. Mary Magdalene. There you will find the Lamb; there you will find me; and you will be able to satisfy all your desires there."

The Crucifix here mentioned is the celebrated "*Volto Santo*," before which it is certain St. Catherine herself passed many hours of prayer. This curious and beautiful cedar-wood Crucifix, whose workmanship is ascribed by tradition to Nicodemus, has been venerated from time immemorial in the Cathedral of Lucca, whither it is said to have been brought miraculously from Palestine. The crowned and robed Figure of our Lord is one of strange and commanding beauty; and the *Volto Santo*, or Sacred Face, is the object of many pious pilgrimages.¹ Another letter written from Pisa by St. Catherine touches a very different note. It is addressed to the Gonfaloniere and

¹ For an excellent description of the *Volto Santo*, see Mr. Montgomery Carmichael's *In Tuscany*. (Burns & Oates.)

Ancients of Lucca, and rings with Catherine's characteristic confidence and courage. Of the pledged steadfastness of the Lucchesi she was, however, still a little doubtful.

"The true sons of the Church are those who would die a thousand deaths for her, and never abandon her ; whom neither men nor devils could change . . . If you tell me the Holy Church seems to falter and yield, and that it seems impossible she can save herself and her children, I tell you, in spite of appearances, it is not so ! Look within, and you will find a strength which her enemies can never possess . . . I pray you then, my dearest brothers, children of Holy Church, for the Love of Jesus Crucified to be firm and to persevere in the way you have begun, and never to be turned aside by devils, or by men worse than devils. Have no fear that you will sacrifice the peace of your State . . . do not separate yourselves from your Head, and from Him Who is Strength ; do not attach yourselves to a feeble and corrupt member who is separated from that strength. Beware, O beware of such a union ! . . . I come to you from your Crucified Lord to bid you on no account thus pledge yourselves. Understand clearly that if for the sake of peace you do this you will suffer greater loss and ruin than you have ever known, both in body and in soul. Do not therefore fall into such an error, but be true and faithful sons. You know that if a father has many sons, and one alone remains faithful to him, it is to this son he leaves his inheritance. I tell you this so that even were you alone you need not look back. But thank God you are not alone ; the Pisans, your neighbours, are with you, and with them you must remain firm, and persevere. They will never abandon you, but will help and defend you to the death against those who wish to harm you."

St. Catherine returned to Siena—now allied with Florence—in December, 1375. On December 21st Pope Gregory created at Avignon nine new Cardinals, and when their names were made known men's hearts began to fail them for fear. Seven of the nine were Frenchmen—and it was French influence which had for many years been fatal to the policy of the Holy See in Italy : one was the

Pope's nephew, Gerard du Puy, the detested and infamous Abbot of Marmoutier, Legate of Perugia. It is scarcely too much to say that this man's rule justified the revolt of the Papal States—at least, politically. From a sentence at the close of her first and much-quoted letter to Gregory XI it would seem that Catherine wrote to the Pope before the Consistory actually took place. Addressing the Sovereign Pontiff by the name which a little Tuscan child gives its father, "*Babbo mio*," the dyer's daughter of Siena besought him "in terms almost dictatorial," to follow the example of his namesake, St. Gregory the Great, and to make peace with the revolted cities. Like St. Antoninus in the next century, Catherine pointed out that the scandalous exactions of the representatives of the Holy See (to say nothing of the Pope's own residence at Avignon) had been the cause of all the trouble. She declared to Gregory the certain way of ridding Italy of the dread bands of free-lances. "*Courage, dolcissimo Babbo mio! Lift the Standard of the Holy Cross! Return to Rome and preach a glorious Crusade! I beseech you to invite all the rebels to a holy peace, that all their weapons may be turned against the infidels.*" Plainly she told him that his own slackness in fulfilling his good resolutions—thus leaving that power to his Legates which should have been in his own hands—had been the cause of great scandals. "Your delay has caused great trouble. The devil has been working, and still works to prevent you from fulfilling your duty, because he knows it would mean his ruin . . . I pray you to send to Lucca and to Pisa the Paternal message with which God shall inspire you. Help them as far as you can to remain faithful and constant. Until now I have been myself at Pisa and at Lucca, doing my best to prevent them from joining the League of those guilty ones who have rebelled against you. But they are in great perplexity, having received no advice or help from you, though they are ceaselessly worked upon and threatened by your enemies. However, so far they have promised nothing. I beseech you to write urgently to Messer Piero (Gambacorti). Speak to him affectionately, and do not delay. I say no more."

The letter closes with a reference to the election of the new Cardinals. If these were not good and holy men "we must not marvel if the Justice of God sends us chastisements and scourges. Do what you have to do, I pray you, courageously, and in the fear of God alone." Having heard that Fra Elias of Toulouse, Master-General of the Dominicans, was to receive the hat, Catherine begged that Gregory would give them "a wise and virtuous ruler. Such a one is greatly needed, for the Garden of our Order is sadly uncultivated." In a letter written much later to Fra Raimondo, Catherine goes further, and says that the Order which was founded to preach the Faith now contaminates it.¹ But Fra Elias remained Master-General, and unfortunately lived to take part in the Great Schism—on the side of the antipope.

At Siena, Catherine suffered the bitter sorrow of hearing that on March 12th, 1376, the republics of Pisa and Lucca had joined the Florentine League, though both refused to take any part in the war against the Holy See, and Lucca had made even further stipulations. The Florentines were triumphant. They now hoped to gain Rome itself. But not even the passionate appeal in the name of freedom made by the Lily City moved the Romans in their determination to bring about the return of the Pope to the Eternal City—or at least to do nothing to prevent it. Gregory, perhaps touched by Catherine's letter, now sent two ambassadors to Florence to treat for peace; but with characteristic indecision, launched a Bull against the Florentines before the envoys could arrive. In this Bull, after enumerating the crimes and treacheries of the Republic against the Holy See, the Pope commanded the governors who had held office since the revolt began, to appear before him in person at Avignon, and there answer for their sins. The Florentines declared this Process was "too atrocious to be addressed even to schismatics and infidels." Their answer was to induce the revolt of Ascoli, the last of the Papal cities of the Marches of Umbria to remain faithful to Gregory.

St. Catherine wrote to her old friend Niccolo Soderini in Florence, who as a member of one of the governing

¹ Letter 101.

bodies found himself unwillingly under censure, imploring him to do his best to bring Florence to submission, "lest all Tuscany be drawn into the peril." To Gregory XI, "Most Holy, Most Reverend Father in Christ, Sweet Jesus," his "unworthy little daughter Catherine" wrote again urging him to peace. "I see, sweetest *Babbo mio*, that the wolf ravages your sheepfold without let or hindrance," she cries, and points out, by the example of the Good Shepherd, that the only way to bring back the strayed sheep is that of love and peace. "The Sweet Word, stretched upon the arms of the Holy Cross, has fought and won in the tourney of death against Life, of Life against death.¹ By His death He has destroyed our death; He has given Life to us by laying down His own. Thus by Love He has gained us, by Love He has conquered our malice and pride so perfectly that all hearts should be His. He Himself has said that no man has greater Love than he who lays down his life for his friend. What then can we say of the strong and perfect Love which gives its life for its enemy? . . . O sweet and tender Word, by Love Thou hast ransomed Thy sheep, and brought them back to the fold! . . . *O dolcissimo, santissimo Babbo mio*, I see no other way, no other remedy, to bring back your rebellious sheep who have left the fold of Holy Church . . . than this, of conquering their malice by your love. We are yours, O Holy Father, and I know that scarcely any of these men think they are doing wrong. Let us admit that they are inexcusable: yet it has seemed to them that they could not have acted otherwise, knowing the misery, injustice and extortions they have had to endure from wicked pastors and governors. The evil odour of the lives of those whom you know well to be incarnate devils was strong in their nostrils, and they fell into the shameful fear of Pilate, who, lest he should lose the power of his high estate, condemned Jesus Christ. Not otherwise have these acted, and they have persecuted you. *Santissimo*, I ask mercy for them! . . . Draw them to yourself by the charm of your loving-kindness. If you

¹ These words, written in the spring of 1376, were evidently suggested to St. Catherine by the Easter Sequence: "*Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando: dux vitæ mortuus, regnat vivus.*"

rebuke, rebuke gently . . . Call them, and they will hasten to lay their heads in your lap."

Thus the Saint, who certainly understood her hot-blooded, childlike compatriots better than the timid, vacillating Frenchman who then sat on the throne of Peter. "All these are ready to lay down their lives for Christ," she urges, "Rise, O *Babbo mio*, and lift the Standard of the Holy Cross, and you will see these wolves become lambs. Peace, Peace, Peace!—so that we lose not this great opportunity through war . . . Alas! I die of grief and cannot die! Return, return! Resist no longer the Will of God, Which calls you! Your starving sheep are waiting for you to come and sit on the throne of your predecessor and chief, St. Peter! . . . Come quickly, and delay no more. Take courage and fear nothing, for God is with you."

All Catherine's letters to Gregory are in this strain—a wonderful mingling of the humility of a pleading child, and the stern voice of a prophet of old. Worse troubles were speedily to befall, and as if to strengthen and encourage her to receive them one sweet ray of human consolation was sent to her in the early months of 1376, in the shape of a new friend, to whom in all probability she dictated the foregoing letter. Catherine was in Siena until May, 1376, and the beautiful story of her meeting with Stefano Maconi must be told in his own words. He was a young noble of the same age as Catherine; his family being of some importance. "I must admit," he writes, "that although a citizen of Siena, neither I nor mine had any relations with Catherine and her relations previous to the year 1376 . . . My family was then engaged in a quarrel, through no fault of our own [with the Tolomei and the Rinaldini]; and it was impossible to hope for any sort of settlement. Catherine then enjoyed a great reputation in Tuscany, where everybody was speaking of her virtues, and relating the wonders she had wrought. I was told that if I asked her intercession in this affair she would certainly obtain peace, as she had already done in many other cases."

Stefano took counsel of a mutual friend, who had thus been reconciled by the Saint, and who promised to

introduce Maconi to Catherine. "We paid her a visit, and she received me, not with the shyness and timidity of a young maiden as I had imagined, but with the tenderness of a sister to whom her brother has been restored after a long journey. I was greatly astonished, and eagerly listened to the earnest words in which she engaged me to go to confession and live like a good Christian. I said to myself: '*Digitus Dei hic est*'—the Finger of God is here. When I explained to her the object of my visit she answered me unhesitatingly: 'Go, my son, trust in the Lord! I will do all in my power to bring about a lasting peace. Let me take the responsibility of the whole affair.'"

Catherine then arranged that on a certain day the Tolomei and the Rinaldini should meet Stefano and his father, Corrado Maconi, in the church of San Cristoforo, where they were all to be publicly reconciled. But though the Maconi family were present, the hostile factions did not appear, desiring to add a fresh and deadly insult to those already heaped upon their enemies. "If they will not listen to me," said the Saint, "they will be obliged to listen to Almighty God"; and kneeling to pray before the High Altar she was presently rapt into ecstasy. Very soon the Tolomei and Rinaldini, unknown to each other, stole secretly into the church, moved by an irresistible power. There they beheld a glory of light radiating from the kneeling figure before the High Altar, and saw Corrado and Stefano patiently awaiting them. Struck with shame, they acknowledged that God had led them there, and committing the whole matter into Catherine's hands, the quarrel was speedily made up, and the *vendetta* closed with the kiss of peace.

Henceforth Stefano was Catherine's "dearest son." She became "one with him in love and friendship," as she wrote shortly afterwards to his mother, from Avignon. Attractive, handsome, brilliant, the young patrician, though one of a gay company whose chief aim was to enjoy life, had been distinguished from his fellows by a certain lofty purity of soul and innate gentleness of manners that made him very dear to Catherine. Though not her latest, he was her best-loved son; and it speaks volumes for the supernatural character of the mutual love

of all concerned that Stefano di Corrado Maconi and Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi formed a close and intimate friendship that was destined to last till death. Others were openly jealous of the affection shown by Catherine to Stefano—but Neri, almost her earliest disciple, and up till now perhaps the best-loved—never! His natural tendency to melancholy was lightened by Stefano's sunny gaiety and sweetness; while on the other hand his own beautiful and unselfish character modified and restrained that of the brilliant youth who now became Catherine's second secretary. Her correspondence was by this time so important and engrossing that it needed responsible and educated scribes to undertake it. "At that period," writes Stefano, "she asked me to write some letters under her dictation. Most joyfully did I agree, and soon I felt my heart burn within me with a new love for heavenly things . . . I began to feel such shame for my past life that I could not bear to think of it." He was, of course, a mark for all the gossips and street-idlers, who flung the nickname "*Caterinato*" after him as he passed to and fro from the Fullonica; but in all this he took delight, for the sake of the new pure love which became the one engrossing human affection of his long life. It was Stefano who carried the body of St. Catherine in his arms after her death, to the Minerva, where it was exposed for veneration, just as it was Catherine who, after her death, did such great things for Stefano that he could not "bring himself to speak of them"; so that "after God and His Holy Mother" he knew himself to be most indebted to his friend. Something in his bright and irresistibly cheerful character appealed to Catherine's inborn optimism—to the increase of that spirit of joy which she knew to be inseparable from the inner life of holiness. She who "saw souls as we see faces"—it is Stefano who writes it—looked on his and understood its beauty. "I had very intimate relations with Catherine," he tells us, "because I wrote her letters. Also she told me many of her most secret transactions. I was fully in her confidence, and she dictated to me part of her book.¹ She loved me with the tenderness of a mother—much more indeed than I

¹ The *Dialogue*.

deserved . . . I do not remember ever to have heard an idle word from her lips. She instantly turned our most frivolous conversations to some spiritual end. Her heart was never satisfied with speaking of God and of holy things, and I think, had she had someone to listen to her, she never would have slept or eaten."

St. Catherine's letters to Pope Gregory seem to have had as little effect as the terrible denunciations of St. Bridget. The terms offered to the Florentines by the Papal envoys in March, 1376, were indignantly rejected by the Signoria. The Holy Father had not taken to heart Catherine's advice to gain his rebellious children by love. A few days later Bologna rose and drove out the Legate, de Noëllat—a crushing blow for the Holy See. Towns were sacked everywhere, amid scenes of appalling cruelty. One thing only restrained the Florentines: if the Pope put their city under an Interdict their commerce would be ruined. So great was the spiritual power of the Church whose temporal power they earnestly sought to destroy. They felt that any sacrifice, even of pride, must be made to prevent the publishing of the Interdict, and they agreed to request Catherine, now the well-known Ambassador of Peace, to go to Avignon, and beg for terms from the Pope for Florence. Fra Raimondo himself was to go first with a small party of priests, bearing a letter from the Saint to the Pontiff, and he started about the end of March, followed shortly by Neri di Landoccio, with another letter to Gregory XI. Meantime the two Florentine ambassadors sent some time previously, who had already reached Avignon, found the Pope obdurate. Florence was to be punished sternly. With despair in their hearts they heard him lay their beautiful city under an Interdict. One of them, in the presence of Gregory, turning to the great Crucifix, appealed from the Pope to Christ Himself.

Early in April our Lord appeared to Catherine, laying the Cross on her shoulders and placing an olive-branch in her hand, revealing to her that though offences must needs come; though those through whom they came must needs be punished, yet the Church should rise glorious from her humiliation. He bade her go out into the world, declaring to the nations: "Behold, I bring good tidings of great

joy." Immediately she offered herself to the Republic as mediator between Florence and the offended Pope. The Signoria had apparently waited to see the success of Fra Raimondo's mission before applying directly to "the virgin of Siena." "They had decided," says Raimondo, "that I should go first." But now they accepted her offer with joy. Thus, at the beginning of May, 1376, after two years' absence, Catherine came once more to Florence with her Little Company, among whom were her women friends, Fra Bartolommeo, and Stefano. On May 11th, the Florentines began to obey the Interdict. "Though they no longer celebrate the Body of Christ to us," writes a Florentine chronicler, "we see Him inwardly in our hearts, and He knoweth we are not pagans and infidels, but will ever be Christians, chosen of God." So great was the increase of devotion in the city that their enemies said the Florentines wished to obtain their own ends with the Pope by humility!

It is not certain whether Catherine was the accredited envoy of the Eight of War, or of the *Parte Guelfa*—two of the frequently-changed councils by which Florence was so unfortunately governed. "When the Saint undertook this long and painful journey," says Raimondo, "they promised to send after her deputies with strict orders not to do anything without her counsel." He adds, however, that some of those in office were "genuine hypocrites," as was proved by their subsequent conduct. We are at least sure that she went on the understanding that these envoys should follow her speedily. Thus, at the end of May, 1376, accompanied by her faithful Lisa, Alessia, Cecca, and the rest of her devoted friends, Catherine left Florence for Avignon.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSION OF PEACE TO CHRISTENDOM

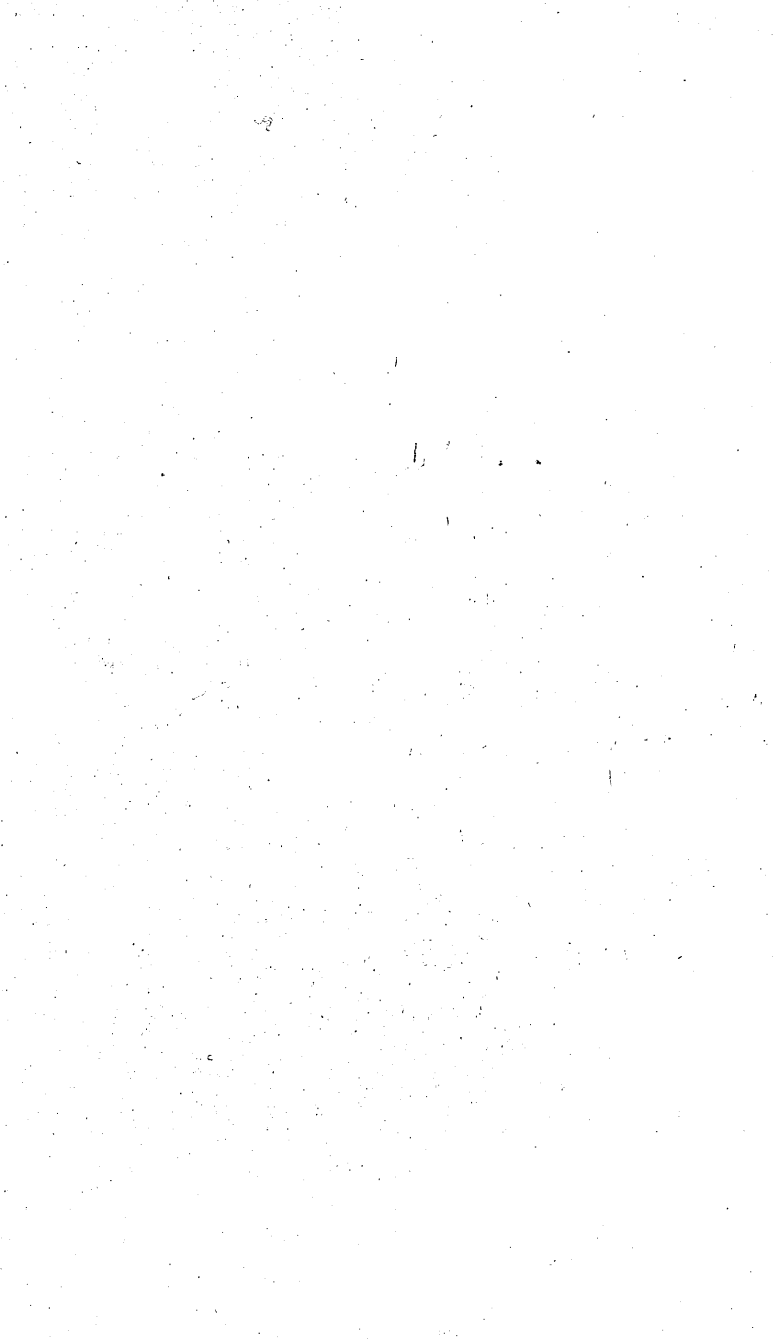
(1376-1378)

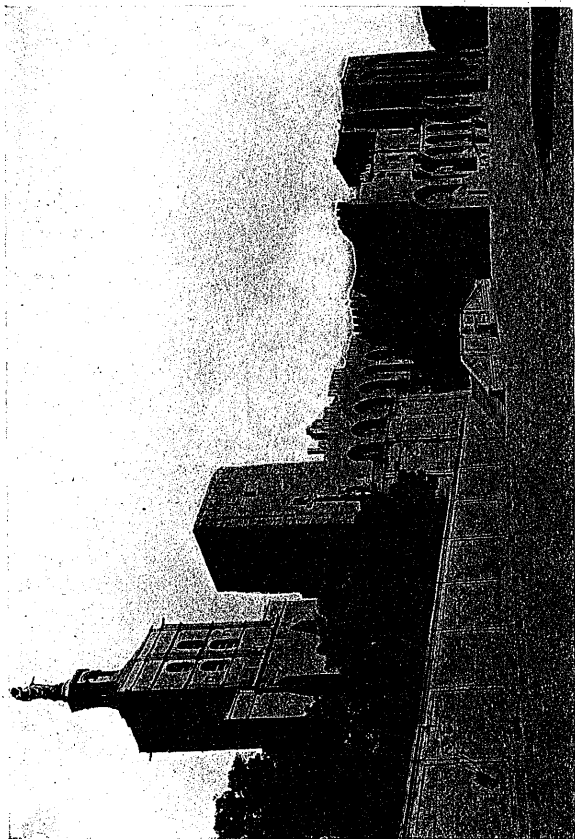
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STEFANO MACONI had obtained the fulfilment of Catherine's earliest promise. She had said to him shortly after their friendship had begun: "Dearest son, know that soon you shall have your heart's desire." Much surprised, "for in his heart he felt he no longer desired any earthly thing," he asked: "My very dear mother, what is my heart's desire?" "Look into your heart," replied Catherine. Then he acknowledged that his heart's desire was to remain always near her. Instantly she replied: "It shall be satisfied." "I could not understand," he says, "how such a thing could possibly be; but He to Whom all things are possible sent her to Avignon, to Gregory XI, and notwithstanding my unworthiness, I was chosen to travel in her company. I left my father and mother, my family and kindred, with joy, so happy was I to enjoy the sweet presence and friendship of Catherine."

The route followed by the little band is not stated, but the party reached Avignon on June 18th, 1376. Two days later Gregory XI received Catherine in private audience; and the writer of these astonishing letters to the Sovereign Pontiff was at last able to plead her cause in person. The French Pope treated her with uniform courtesy and kindness. She was his guest during the three months she spent at Avignon, and he supplied the greater part of the money for her return journey, the rest being furnished by the brother of the King of France, the Duc d'Anjou.

Avignon is inseparably connected with the Great Schism. It was the residence of the antipopes, whose reign was so speedily and so sadly to begin. But it must not be forgotten that for seventy years it had also been the residence of the successors of St. Peter. Without entering



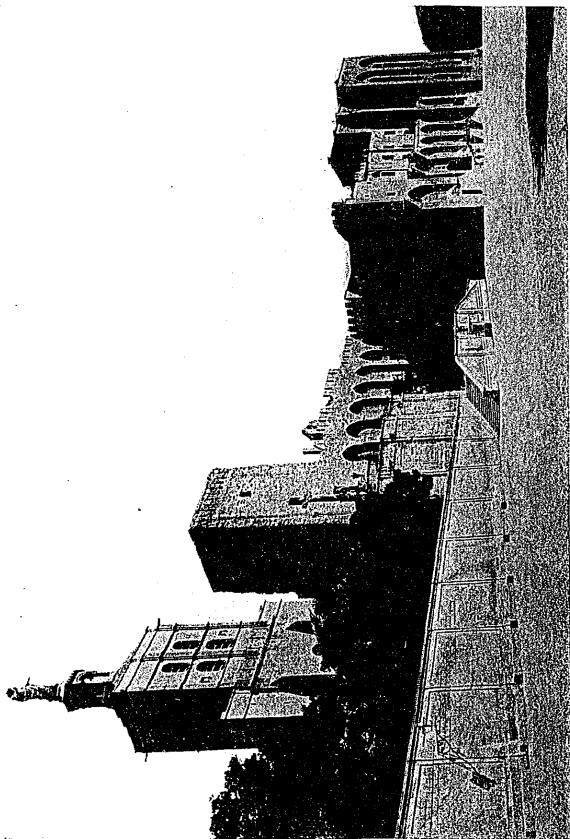


THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME DES DOMS AND THE PAPAL
PALACE, AVIGNON

into the historical events which led to Rome being forsaken by the Popes, it will be well to understand how it came to pass that the Vicar of Christ now dwelt on the shore of the Rhone, under the direct protection of the King of France, so that Dante reproaches the Holy Father with having "married" the Papacy to that country. The Pontiff was, as it were, Court-Chaplain to the French monarch.

Avignon, "the Babylon of the Apocalypse," as Petrarch calls it, was not, however, in French territory. It lay in the Comté of Venaissin, which in St. Dominic's day had been in possession of Peter of Aragon; and it had been purchased outright for a large sum from Queen Giovanna of Naples by Urban V. Why, then, had the Holy Father removed the chair of St. Peter to Avignon, and what evils had resulted from his absence from Rome?

When, in 1308, Bertrand de Got, Archbishop of Bordeaux (then an English possession under Edward II), succeeded the saintly Dominican Pope Benedict XI as Clement V, he chose to be consecrated at Lyons. His election had been effected through the influence of one of the most unprincipled kings who ever ruled France—Philippe le Bel, a man who was already guilty of sacrilege, if not of murder, in the terrible case of Pope Boniface VIII (1303); and who was popularly supposed to have removed his successor, Benedict XI, by poison, in spite of all the undeserved lenity and kindness shown to him by the Friar-Pope. For political reasons Philippe was anxious to suppress the military-monastic Order of the Knights Templars, which for over 200 years had rendered invaluable services to Christendom. He was jealous of their power; he coveted their riches. It had therefore been agreed between him and de Got that if the latter were to be elected Pope he would consent to this suppression. He did so. The shameful story of Clement V's cowardly subservience and Philippe's cunning brutality does not belong to the history of St. Catherine, though it is a deadly stain on that of France. The suppression was carried out, and after burning fifty-four of the Knights for retracting confessions made under torture in 1310, the butchery was completed in 1314 by the burning alive of the Grand



THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME DES DOMS AND THE TALAT.
TALAT, AVIGNON

into the historical events which led to Rome being forsaken by the Popes, it will be well to understand how it came to pass that the Vicar of Christ now dwelt on the shore of the Rhone, under the direct protection of the King of France, so that Dante reproaches the Holy Father with having "married" the Papacy to that country. The Pontiff was, as it were, Court-Chaplain to the French monarch.

Avignon, "the Babylon of the Apocalypse," as Petrarch calls it, was not, however, in French territory. It lay in the Comté of Venaissin, which in St. Dominic's day had been in possession of Peter of Aragon; and it had been purchased outright for a large sum from Queen Giovanna of Naples by Urban V. Why, then, had the Holy Father removed the chair of St. Peter to Avignon, and what evils had resulted from his absence from Rome?

When, in 1308, Bertrand de Got, Archbishop of Bordeaux (then an English possession under Edward II), succeeded the saintly Dominican Pope Benedict XI as Clement V, he chose to be consecrated at Lyons. His election had been effected through the influence of one of the most unprincipled kings who ever ruled France—Philippe le Bel, a man who was already guilty of sacrilege, if not of murder, in the terrible case of Pope Boniface VIII (1303); and who was popularly supposed to have removed his successor, Benedict XI, by poison, in spite of all the undeserved lenity and kindness shown to him by the Friar-Pope. For political reasons Philippe was anxious to suppress the military-monastic Order of the Knights Templars, which for over 200 years had rendered invaluable services to Christendom. He was jealous of their power; he coveted their riches. It had therefore been agreed between him and de Got that if the latter were to be elected Pope he would consent to this suppression. He did so. The shameful story of Clement V's cowardly subservience and Philippe's cunning brutality does not belong to the history of St. Catherine, though it is a deadly stain on that of France. The suppression was carried out, and after burning fifty-four of the Knights for retracting confessions made under torture in 1310, the butchery was completed in 1314 by the burning alive of the Grand

Master, and a number of his noble companions. This horror took place in Paris, on the spot marked to-day by the statue of Henri IV.

This was the Pope, the tool of the King of France, who, after two or three years' wandering, "moved by his love for his country and his desire to escape the turmoils which convulsed Italy," settled down in beautiful Avignon on the banks of the Rhone. It was the beginning of sorrows. "No one," says Pastor, "who has any idea of the nature and the necessity of historical continuity, can fail to perceive the danger of the transference of this centre of ecclesiastical unity to Southern France. The Papal Powers and the general interests of the Church, which at that time required quiet progress, and in many ways thorough reform, must inevitably in the long run be severely shaken." Nevertheless, in Avignon the Popes remained, during the reigns of six of their number, though Urban V (1362-70) did return to Rome for a short time. But in spite of warnings and prayers; of the prophecy of his speedy death by St. Bridget of Sweden, he did not remain there, but returned to die beneath the sun of Provence. The Palace of the Popes at Avignon, which has well been described as the most wonderful mediæval building in the world, rose stately, strong, and beautiful under the hands of Clement V and his successors beside the ancient Cathedral of Notre Dame des Doms; above the famous Roman bridges of the Rhone, and the mighty fortifications, all of which still exist; the walls and defences of Avignon indeed rivalling those of Carcassonne. A visit to Avignon to-day can do more to recall the realities of the fourteenth century than a pilgrimage to Rome.

The best reply to the question: What evils had been wrought by the Pope's absence from Rome? can be given by pointing out the state of Italy in 1376, when, as we have seen, almost the entire country except the Eternal City itself was leagued to prevent the Pope's return; when mercenaries hired by him were committing excesses too frightful to be described in these pages; when he was cheated and deceived by the "incarnate devils" who were his Legates in Italy; when Milan and Florence both lay under an Interdict; while the entire peninsula

was bound up in an apparently inextricable tangle of misery, intrigue, and crime. It is impossible to excuse or to explain away the deeds which filled all Christendom with horror. Rome itself was falling into decay. During the Avignon period cattle had been grazing, says Pastor, "at the very foot of the altars in St. Peter and St. John Lateran." "A Legate sold the marble blocks of the Colosseum to be burnt for lime." Orvieto got more marble from Rome than from all the quarries of Carrara. The only public work carried out during this time was the building of the wonderful stairway that leads up to Ara Coeli. "The ruins of two epochs—heathen antiquity and the Christian middle-ages—made up the Rome of those days."

St. Catherine came to Avignon with a threefold purpose: to beg for peace with the Florentines; to plead with the Pope to return to Rome; to endeavour to promote the Crusade. Fra Raimondo, who met her on her arrival, was her interpreter with Gregory XI at each audience granted her by the Holy Father, the first of which took place on June 20th, 1376. So deeply impressed was the Supreme Pontiff with the holiness and common sense of this wonderful woman, whom he already believed to be a Saint, that "to prove he was in earnest in seeking peace" he placed the whole matter of the Florentines in her hands, bidding her, however, to be careful for the honour of the Church. Her great anxiety now was that the promised ambassadors from Florence should appear, to plead their own cause, and offer their submission in person. The reason of their delay was due to political treachery, for though their coming had been announced to the Pope in due form, they did not arrive until some time in the month of July.

Meanwhile in Florence counsels were divided. Some were for peace; some for war, in the hope of crushing the Temporal Power entirely; and preparations to this end were still being pushed on, though Catherine had gone to Avignon on the distinct understanding that nothing of the kind was to be attempted. The real explanation seems to be the pernicious manner in which Florence was then governed—*i.e.*, by several distinct and separate

councils, each constantly changed, each having independent authority. Thus there was no continuous and direct line of policy in Florence. At the end of June Catherine wrote a pleading letter to the Eight of War, explaining the "shame and confusion" that their action was causing, and the dishonourable light in which it must appear to Gregory, who would not know whether to judge them by her words or their own deeds. The Government had indeed been changed since her departure, and this explains the curious—and to anyone but Catherine, humiliating—fact that she was now officially ignored by the people at whose request she had come to Avignon. "I declare to you, Catherine," said the Holy Father, "that your hope is in vain! They will deceive you as they have already deceived me. Even if they send the ambassadors it will be to no purpose." So strongly did Gregory feel on the subject that fresh penalties were already being enacted against Florence, which was now threatened with the Papal anathema, and the threat that a World-Crusade should be preached against her, when at last the ambassadors arrived at Avignon.

Fra Raimondo tells us that the Florentine Government subsequently confessed to him that at the time they asked publicly for peace they were secretly plotting against Catherine; and intended to persist in their attempt to destroy the Temporal Power of the Church. Thus the visit of the envoys, as indeed it presently appeared, was made more for the purpose of self-justification than from motives of humility. He adds: "Catherine sent for the ambassadors as soon as they arrived, and told them in my presence of the powers which the Governors of Florence had bestowed upon her. She announced to them that the Sovereign Pontiff had entrusted the peace negotiations to her, and that thus they could, if they would, obtain favourable conditions." They replied that they had no instructions to deal with her; that they had come to Avignon to treat with the Pope, and not with a woman.

So far, however, from being discouraged, Catherine continued to intercede with Gregory XI, "asking for the Florentines the clemency of a Father, rather than the severity of a Judge." The Pope eventually appointed two

French Cardinals to treat with the ambassadors from Florence. The Interdict was being enforced by many foreign countries, especially France; and though England had compromised for the sake of her commerce, very great injury had already been done to Florentine trade. But the ambassadors still refused to agree to the Pope's terms of peace, which included the abandonment of all their allies, and the payment of an enormous fine. Probably they regretted too late their refusal of Catherine's gentle mediation. In September they were ordered to leave Avignon, and returned to Florence where their report filled the city with consternation. The Signoria now appealed to the Powers of Europe—including Visconti of Milan and the Doges of Venice and Genoa—to whom they related their version of the affair. It was decided that the rebellion should be continued, and in order to find money for the war the confiscation of Church property was decreed.

Meanwhile Catherine was steadfastly pursuing the other aims of her mission. On one occasion Gregory said to her: "First, peace must be established among Christians, and then we might organize a Crusade." But Catherine answered: "Holy Father, there exists no better means for the re-establishing of peace among Christians than the undertaking of a Crusade, for thus the fire would be extinguished for want of fuel." In this regard, though the Saint never gave up hope, nothing definite was ever done, though even the Great Schism itself could scarcely daunt Catherine's zeal. She never ceased her entreaties that Pope Gregory XI should return to Rome. Here success seemed more probable, and all this propaganda very naturally stirred up countless enemies, especially among the French Cardinals, whose personal interests imperatively required the Pope to remain at Avignon. "The greater part of the Court," says Fra Bartolommeo, "rose up against her." Eminent ecclesiastics arose to confound her. "Three Prelates of very high rank," says Stefano Maconi, "came to see the Pope regarding her. 'Most Holy Father,' they asked, 'is this Catherine of Siena as saintly as she pretends to be?' To which the Pope replied: 'I am persuaded that she is a Saint.' 'With

permission of your Holiness we will pay her a visit,' they said, to which the Pope rejoined : ' In that case I do not doubt you will be greatly edified.' They came, indeed, to our lodging at the hour of None. It was in summer. They knocked, and I opened the door. ' Go and tell Catherine,' said they, ' that we wish to speak to her.' Immediately the Blessed went down to them with her confessor, and a few other Religious. The Prelates bade her be seated, and began speaking to her very haughtily, trying to irritate her by grievous and bitter words. Among other things they said : ' We come from the Sovereign Pontiff, and we wish to know if the Florentines did actually send you to him, as you pretend. If they did so it must be because they have no man capable of transacting so important a business, but if they did not we are astonished that a little insignificant woman like you should presume to confer with the Holy Father on these great matters.' Catherine heard them quite calmly, and answered them with a humility and charm that excited their surprise. When she had satisfied them on this subject they proposed to her some very difficult questions concerning her ecstasies, her manner of life . . . and the means which she adopted for avoiding the deceits of Satan. This conference lasted until night, and I was witness of it. Occasionally Fra Giovanni (Tantucci, who had accompanied Raimondo) attempted to reply for Catherine, and although he was a Master of Sacred Theology the Prelates were so skilful they confounded him in few words, saying : ' You should blush to advance such things in our presence ; let her reply, for she satisfies us far better than you ! ' There was among these Prelates an Archbishop of the Order of Friars Minor, who sometimes did not appear to accept what Catherine said. Then the other two defended her, saying : ' Why question her any further ? She has explained these things to us more clearly and precisely than any Doctor could have done.' At length they withdrew, edified and reassured, and told the Pope they had never met a soul so humble and so enlightened.

" When the Pope was informed of this he was much vexed, and apologized to Catherine, assuring her that he

had not sent these Prelates, and advising her not to receive them if they came again. The next day Messer Francesco, who was of Siena, and at that time physician to His Holiness, said to me: 'Do you know who those Prelates were who went to see you?' I answered: 'No.' 'Know,' said he, 'that if the knowledge and learning of those three men were put in one of the scales of a balance, and that of the whole Roman Curia on the other, the weight of the three would outbalance the rest. And I tell you plainly that if they had not found Catherine solid in virtue it would have been well for her never to have come to Avignon.' "

Catherine was granted interviews with many of the Cardinals. The whole court was impressed by the simple and upright bearing of this Tuscan *popolana*, thus suddenly brought into the midst of a gay and luxurious society which must have been a startling revelation to her, and which nevertheless she regarded with serene dignity and aloofness. Alas! Catherine had come to Avignon "prepared to find it Paradise; and found there instead the stench of hell." To her, as to St. Philip Neri in later years, and to other Saints, had been granted that terrible and mysterious faculty of sensibility to the very odour of mortal sin. A great lady of edifying and pious demeanour called upon the Saint one day, but to Fra Raimondo's surprise—for he, good simple man, was entirely deceived—Catherine refused to speak to her, and even turned her head away, so that the lady was obliged to leave without seeing her face. Questioned by her confessor as to this strange behaviour, Catherine exclaimed: "My dear Father, had you perceived as I did the abominable stench of that woman's sins I verily believe you would have been ill." On inquiry the Dominican discovered that the lady in question was living in open sin with a great prelate of the court.

But there were others belonging to the court who conceived a true devotion and friendship for St. Catherine. Of these the most important was the Vice-Chancellor of the Curia, Bartolommeo Prignano, Archbishop of Acerenza, a stern man of virtuous and upright life, and an enemy of all luxury and vice. Fra Bartolommeo tells us this

dignitary was at first hostile to Catherine, but afterwards became her firm friend. He was to become the successor of Gregory XI—the ill-fated Urban VI. Another friend was Messer Tommaso Petra, the Papal Secretary, to whom the Saint was much attached, and with whom she corresponded. Some, like the Pope himself, esteemed Catherine as a Saint of God. Of such was the Pontiff's sister, the Duchesse de Valentinois, "a very pious woman who often talked with Catherine, feeling a great affection and deep veneration for her." This lady earnestly desiring to be present one day when Catherine received Holy Communion, Fra Raimondo promised to let her know when this would be. The Pope had given Catherine and her party "handsome lodgings, with a chapel richly adorned"; and to this chapel Catherine entered "the following Sunday, wearing on her feet nothing but sandals." During her preparation for Holy Communion she was ravished in ecstasy, and Raimondo sent Stefano—who tells the story—to summon the Duchesse to the chapel. She came, bringing with her another lady, Alys, Comtesse de Turenne, wife of the Pope's nephew, "a young person full of vanity and an entire stranger to Divine things. Whilst the Pope's sister was praying in a very devout manner, this young lady, imagining as I suppose that Catherine was feigning an ecstasy, knelt down after Mass, pretending to kiss her feet, as if from devotion. In reality she pierced them several times with a long, sharp pin." Catherine remained motionless. "She would not have stirred even had her foot been cut off," but when she recovered the use of her senses her foot caused her intense pain. Her friends soon discovered the injury—which we are told elsewhere was really severe—"and understood the malice of her who suspected Catherine."

Alys de Turenne was typical of the vain and giddy young women who thronged the Papal Court, where, as Catherine felt, their presence was both undesirable and disedifying. Fra Raimondo tells us that at one of the interviews between Catherine and the Pope, the Saint asked why, in the Court of Rome, in which all the virtues ought to bloom, she found nothing but the most disgraceful vices. The Sovereign Pontiff asked her how long it

was since she had arrived at Avignon, and on hearing that it was only a few days, said : "How have you learnt so soon what occurs here?" "Then Catherine, rising from her humble posture in order to assume an air of authority which surprised me, said : 'I must declare to the glory of Almighty God that I have perceived more clearly the infectious odour of the sins which are committed in the Court of Rome, while I was yet in my native city, than even those who committed them, and are still committing them.' The Pope remained silent. I could not overcome my surprise ; nor shall I ever forget the tone of authority in which Catherine spoke to that great Pontiff."

In truth Gregory XI was in grievous distress and uncertainty. His own conscience told him that Catherine was right when she bade him leave everything, face the wrath of his Cardinals and the displeasure of King Charles V, and return to Rome. He was now in that psychological state in which, though he had interiorly actually decided upon going, he had not yet realized his decision, though his sensitive imagination already pictured its results. Miserable hours were his, while the French Cardinals strained every nerve to counteract Catherine's influence ; exaggerating the disturbed state of Rome, the anarchical condition of Italy, the dangers of the journey ; pointing out the personal risk he would incur, and even presenting him with a letter, purporting to be written by a holy person, in which he was warned that his life would be attempted by poison if he returned to Rome. This letter was instantly discredited by Catherine, to whom the Pope showed it. His firm belief that the Holy Ghost spoke to him through the mouth of this weak woman had been unshaken since one of their early interviews, when he had asked her opinion on the subject of his return—though from her letters he must have known it only too well. On her humbly excusing herself, and saying it did not become her to give advice to the Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory, whose nerves were in a state of high tension, rejoined rather sharply : "I do not ask you to give me advice, but to declare to me the Will of God." "And as she continued to excuse herself," proceeds Fra Raimondo, "he commanded her, under holy obedience, to tell him

whether she was really aware of God's Will on the matter? She bowed her head, saying: 'Who knows more perfectly the Will of God than your Holiness, who has bound himself by a vow?' At these words the Holy Father was filled with astonishment, for no one knew that he had taken a vow to return to Rome; and it was at that very moment he decided to leave Avignon."



Catherine, who knew this resolve had been taken, was longing to return to Siena, for the whole atmosphere of Avignon was distasteful to her. Except for a short visit paid to the wife of Louis, Duc d'Anjou, at the earnest request of that prince, who had been much impressed by St. Catherine and who had promised her to join the Crusade, she had now spent nearly three months out of her native land. It was from the Duc d'Anjou's *château* of Villeneuve that at his request she wrote to his

brother, the King of France, begging him to lose no time in raising the standard of the Cross. But Gregory, knowing his own weakness, would not hear of her return. The French Cardinals made a last appeal, eminently adapted to move the man to whom it was addressed. Gregory wrote of his difficulty to Catherine. "Alas, most Holy Father," runs her answering letter, "they quote the example of Clement IV [who did nothing without consulting his Cardinals], but they forget to speak of Urban V, who only asked their counsel in doubtful cases, but who in clear and obvious matters, such as this of your return, never dreamt of consulting them. He followed his own judgment without troubling himself about their opposition . . . Make use of a pious ruse: appear to defer your departure, and then depart suddenly; for the quicker you do this, the less you will have to suffer." This letter closes very touchingly: "I will not weary you longer, though I have much to say to you. Remain in the Holy and Sweet Love of God. Forgive my presumption."

Gregory did follow Catherine's advice exactly. He suddenly announced, "to the incredulous dismay of the Sacred College," that he would depart forthwith. No persuasions or entreaties availed to move him. The State galleys waiting at Marseilles were made ready, and on September 13th, 1376, Pope Gregory XI, with all but six Cardinals, left Avignon for ever, amid evil omens which must have shaken the Pontiff's sorely-tried mind, though they could not overthrow his resolution. On October 2nd, the Pope and his retinue embarked at Marseilles for Genoa, whither Catherine had gone by land. So rough was the sea, and so severely did the little fleet suffer, that it was not until October 18th that the Pope reached the latter city, and once more set foot on the soil of Italy, where Catherine and her friends awaited his coming.

Meanwhile the Florentines, aghast at the prospect of Gregory's return, and feeling sure that when he was once in Rome they would be able to make no headway against him—so curiously did the mediæval mind distinguish between the Temporal and Spiritual Power of the Holy See—had been doing their best to foment rebellion in

Rome, and to stir up afresh the revolted cities of the Patrimony. The French Cardinals were delighted: "they exaggerated every report, represented the stormy weather as a Divine warning, and urged the Pope to reconsider the situation."

Gregory was about to yield to the proposals of the hastily-called Consistory, and return to Avignon, when he remembered Catherine, who was now established in the house of a great lady in Genoa, and was besieged all day by eager visitors. Not choosing to compromise the Pontifical dignity by appearing publicly among the crowd, Gregory visited the Saint in disguise, late in the evening after the Consistory. Catherine recognized him, and prostrated herself, but Gregory bade her arise, for that he, not she, was the suppliant. He laid the case before her, listened to her burning words of counsel and comfort, and finally departed reassured and full of a steady determination to persevere.

This extraordinary interview, unparalleled in the history of any successor of St. Peter, may be regarded as the most momentous in Catherine's life. The Pope had turned from his Cardinals to seek the advice of the dyer's daughter—the one being in the world in whom he trusted perfectly, and who, he knew, would not fail him. And Catherine of Siena did not fail him. Her hand it was that steered the barque of Peter back to Rome, never again to leave it. If every other mission in which she was engaged had failed—if every miracle she wrought were forgotten—this one fact would constitute her title to honour. But as he hastened to meet his Cardinals, and tell them to prepare for immediate departure, the Pope did not know he had in this world looked his last upon the face of her who had thus altered the fortunes of Christendom. For in this life Catherine of Siena and Gregory XI were destined never to meet again.

On October 29th Gregory and his retinue sailed from Genoa, and after many delays, the Supreme Pontiff entered the Eternal City in triumph on January 17th, 1377.

(2)

ST. CATHERINE'S journey by land to Genoa, through the beautiful country which we now call the Riviera, had been a pleasant and eventful one. We hear of her first at Toulon. "The very stones," says Fra Raimondo, "seemed to cry out that Catherine was coming," as they entered a town. At Toulon she healed a sick child who was laid in her lap by its weeping mother—a miracle of which the Bishop was instantly informed. It is difficult to think that she would have left La Sainte Baume—the traditional retreat of St. Mary Magdalene for thirty-three years—unvisited, when we remember Catherine's devotion to her "Mother and Protectress"; but there is no local tradition of her having been there; and as the place even to-day is difficult of access, and was rather remote from the main road which the Saint followed, it is possible she may have passed it by.

One unfortunate incident of the journey must have wounded her affectionate heart very deeply. The Pope had given her a hundred florins, and the Duc d'Anjou a hundred francs for the travelling expenses of her party; and this—a considerable sum in those days—was stolen from her by one of her company who was a thief, and kept the purse. He disappeared one day, with all the money. His name is unknown. At Varazze (Voragine), near Genoa, Catherine halted to visit the tomb of a celebrated Dominican *Beato*, Blessed Giacomo di Voragine, who had been Archbishop of Genoa, and who is best known as the compiler of the celebrated *Legenda Aurea*—a book in which St. Catherine always took great delight. Varazze was depopulated, its streets grass-grown, its houses shuttered and empty. Scarcely a soul had been spared there by the ravages of the plague of 1374. The Saint bade the few inhabitants who were left to build a church in honour of the Blessed Trinity, promising them that so Varazze should henceforth be exempt from the plague. This prophecy was strictly fulfilled, for since the erection of a church in honour of the Holy Trinity, of the Blessed Virgin, of Blessed Giacomo di Voragine, and of St.

Catherine herself—for after her canonization her name was added to the list—no visitation of the plague, or of any contagious sickness, even cholera, has been known at Varazze. A second recommendation of the Saint—to build a Convent for the Preaching Friars—was also carried out.¹

Catherine and her friends arrived here on the Eve of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi; and the same evening she told Fra Raimondo that it had just been revealed to her that on that very day a few years later he would transfer her body from one tomb to another with his own hands—a prophecy which was literally accomplished. Fra Bartolommeo, who relates the fact, heard it the same day from Fra Raimondo.

At Genoa, Catherine was lodged in the house of Madonna Orietta Scotta, a lady of one of the oldest Genoese families. As we know, it was here Pope Gregory XI found Catherine on the momentous occasion which has already been described. Here, too, nearly all her company fell ill with a mysterious sickness which was probably a slight form of some malignant fever. All were devotedly nursed by their kind hostess, who had two doctors daily in attendance, and by Stefano and Neri, the latter of whom, however, was soon taken ill himself, and was in such danger that the physicians despaired of his life. “When I gave this news to the Religious and to the company who were at table with me,” says Raimondo, “Stefano Maconi left his repast with a sad heart, and hastened to seek Catherine. Throwing himself at her feet he besought her with tears not to suffer his dear brother and companion to die far from home and to be buried in a strange land, during a journey undertaken for God and for her. Catherine, deeply touched, said with all a mother’s tenderness: ‘My son, why are you so troubled? If it is the Will of God to take Neri to his eternal reward now you ought rather to rejoice.’” But Stefano insisted, being convinced that his “dearest, sweetest Mother” could help him if she would. Then Catherine replied with extreme tenderness: “I only wished to see you accept the Will of God, but since you are in such great

¹ See Drane, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-9, from which the above account is taken.

sorrow, remind me of this before I receive Holy Communion to-morrow, and I will pray for Neri's restoration. Only do you too pray that God may hear me." This Stefano did not fail to do, and after Mass was over, waited at her side. Presently Catherine looked up at him with a smiling face and said: "The grace that you desired has been granted to you." Overcome with joy, Stefano could only stammer: "Dearest Mother, will Neri be cured?" "Most certainly," replied the Saint, "for God desires to restore him to us." Filled with joy, Stefano rushed off to his friend's bedside, and from that moment Neri began to recover.

The sequel to this delightful story is equally touching. Stefano, worn out with nursing his friend—from whom no warnings of danger had been able to separate him—became dangerously ill, with every appearance of what we should now call typhoid fever. "Catherine, having been informed of it," he writes, "came to see me with her confessors and companions, and inquired of me whether I was suffering great pain. Full of delight at her sweet presence I answered cheerfully: 'They say that I suffer, but I cannot tell what is the matter with me.' Then with the tenderness of a mother she placed her pure hand on my forehead, and said, shaking her head a little: 'Do you hear what this child says? He "does not know what is the matter" with him, and he is in high fever.' " Then, in the name of holy obedience, Catherine commanded Stefano to be cured. "She then began talking of God, as was her custom," he continues, "and while she spoke I was made whole. I interrupted her to declare this before all the spectators, and I have never been ill since."¹

From Genoa Catherine wrote tenderly to Monna Lapa, her mother, who seems to have reproached her rather bitterly for absenting herself so long from home. Few, even of the Saint's English biographers, seem to have realized the intense pathos of the tragedy of this poor old woman, so typical of her race and class, so well-meaning, so truly pious, so furious in defending her daughter against every hostile criticism, so jealous of her love, and so

¹ Stefano wrote this account in 1412, for the *Processus* of Venice. He was then Prior of the Certosa of Milan.

entirely incapable of understanding the magnitude and purpose of Catherine's mission. She was now herself a Mantellata, and together with Catherine and several of their friends, had had special privileges conferred upon her by Papal Bull. The pride and joy which she took in her daughter's fame was overshadowed by her resentment at the fact that this dearest of all her children, all sweet and dutiful and submissive as she was, had nevertheless ceased to be a child, and had passed completely out of her keeping. Lapa's appearance is always the signal for the revelation of this tiny, domestic, intimate tragedy.

"My sweetest Mother in Christ, Sweet Jesus," wrote Catherine, "your unworthy and miserable little daughter bids you be of good cheer, in the Precious Blood of the Son of God. With a great desire I have desired that you should be the mother not only of my body, but of my soul. For I think that if you loved my soul better than my body all love that was merely human would die in you, and you would suffer less when I was absent from you . . . You know I must follow the Will of God, and I know you wish me to follow It. His Will was for me to go away, and this absence was the result of the secret designs of His Providence, and has not been without useful results . . . I was obliged to go, following His Footsteps at the time and in the way which pleased His Ineffable Goodness; and you, like a good, sweet mother, should be glad that it is so, and not afflict yourself with all kinds of suffering. Remember how some of your children have had to leave you for temporal reasons, to seek their fortunes elsewhere; and now, when it is a question of Eternal things, you suffer so greatly that you say you shall die if I do not answer quickly . . . Raise, raise your heart and your love toward the Sweet, Most Holy Cross, which soothes all sorrow . . . We shall soon return—indeed, we should have already set out, had not Neri been so seriously ill. Messer Giovanni (Tantucci) and Fra Bartolommeo have been ill likewise."

But poor Monna Lapa's was not the only jealous heart. To Madonna Giovanna Maconi, Stefano's mother, who not unnaturally felt some concern at the complete absorption of her brilliant son by this strange new friend,

Catherine wrote with tact and charm. "Make the sacrifice of your children to God. And if you see that God calls them, do not resist His Sweet Will. If He takes them with one Hand, give them with both." Many a mother, Catherine reminds Madonna Giovanna, thinks her son can serve God in the world as well as in a higher state; but such mothers too often find that their sons are lost both to them and to God. It is impossible to lay down rules for the Holy Spirit of God. "Take courage sweetly and be patient," she concludes, "and do not be vexed if I have kept your Stefano so long away from you. I have taken great care of him, for our mutual affection has made one thing of us, and thus your interests are mine. I hope you have not suffered keenly. For my part I hope to do everything in my power, even to death, for you and for him." The letter closes with greetings to Messer Corrado, Stefano's father, and "to the little new plant which has just taken root in the Garden of Holy Church"—Giovanna's baby daughter.

Genoa is still proud of its association with St. Catherine. Her room in Madonna Orietta's house is preserved with religious care; and the sanctuaries she visited, the streets along which she passed, are yet pointed out with devotion. She laboured unceasingly during the whole time of her stay; receiving great ecclesiastics, senators and nobles, as well as a crowd of less distinguished visitors.

From Genoa the travellers took ship for Livorno, about the middle of November, 1376. The passage was rough and stormy, as Pope Gregory had found it. A story told by Fra Raimondo refers to this voyage. Being in a dangerous channel at midnight the wind dropped, and a dead calm ensuing, the pilot, who feared a sudden squall, became very anxious. "I gave notice to Catherine of our danger. She answered in her ordinary tone: 'Why are you troubled? There is no cause for fear.' I remained silent, feeling reassured, but the wind presently changing in the direction dreaded by the pilot, I mentioned it to Catherine. 'Then in the Name of God, let him put the helm about, and sail under the wind that Heaven will send him,' she said." This being done, the ship caught a

favourable breeze, "and we arrived at the hour of Matins at the desired haven, singing the *Te Deum*."

The *Legenda* of Fra Raimondo might well be entitled the *Fioretti* of St. Catherine!

Landing at Livorno the first figure to catch Catherine's eye was that of the sturdy, dauntless old Tuscan woman who called her daughter. For poor Monna Lapa, escorted by kindhearted Fra Tommaso della Fonte and some of their friends, had made the fatiguing journey from Siena so as to meet Catherine on her arrival! Mindful of another anxious mother, Catherine sent Stefano on to Siena ahead of the rest of the party, and his delightful letter to Neri, written shortly after his arrival at home, is full of characteristic comment on these proceedings. "God knows what I should do with myself if the hope of the time of waiting being short did not sustain me," exclaims this versatile, but devoted friend. But Catherine's own arrival was delayed for a few weeks. There was much to be done at Pisa, since Piero Gambacorti had met the Pope on his arrival at Livorno a short time previously; and with the ambassadors from Lucca had again pleaded for peace with Florence. The Pope had been determined not to grant this except upon his own terms, and doubtless extremely annoyed at the attitude taken up by Pisa and Lucca as regards the League, had refused to listen to them. The Saint reached Siena, probably, at the beginning of 1377.

At home once more she took up the threads of her old life eagerly, and immediately desired to see Francesco Malavolti, who, during her absence, had "fallen somewhat into his old ways again." He was, in fact, at first ashamed to visit her, but she wrote to her "*Carissimo e sopra carissimo figliulo*" a letter that soon brought him penitent to her cell. "It seems to me," said Catherine, "that the devil has thee so tightly chained that he will not let thee go; and I, thy poor mother, go about seeking thee and asking for thee, for I long to carry thee on the shoulders of the grief and compassion I have for thy soul. . . . Alas, alas! where are thy good desires? . . . Make haste to take the remedy. Sleep no more. Console my soul, and no longer be so great an enemy of thine own

salvation as to refuse to come to me. Be not deceived of the devil by fear and shame. Break the chain! Come, come, dearest son! Well may I call thee 'dear,' so many tears, so much grief dost thou cause me! Come back, return to the fold . . . But whether thou comest or not, I ask only one thing: to do the Will of God."

Malavolti himself tells us that when one of Catherine's friends made in his presence, shortly after the Saint had received him back with joy, a jesting remark as to his want of stability, Catherine said: "As to that, my sister, he cannot escape out of my hands, wherever he goes. For when he thinks I am far away I shall put a yoke upon his back of which he will never be able to rid himself." And though they all laughed together over these words, "making merry over him," the young man was to remember them—later. For the next few months he was one of Catherine's most faithful companions, acting as an extra secretary, and following her on all her journeys through the *contado*—the Sienese country-side, which she undertook in the summer of 1377.

Very shortly after Catherine's return to Siena occurred the episode which, as has been well said, "is known to so many that know nought else of Catherine."¹ Niccolo di Toldo, a youth of a noble house of Perugia, had been sentenced to death by the *Riformati* of Siena for some rash words of detraction which he had spoken against the Government of the Republic. The offence in itself was a small thing, and the thought of the appalling penalty seems almost to have turned the poor boy's brain. He refused all the consolations of Fra Tommaso Caffarini, who found him in prison, mad with misery, and absolutely refusing to make his confession, which, says the Dominican, he had not done since his first Communion.

The rest of the story must be told in Catherine's own words, in a letter written to Fra Raimondo, who was then absent from Siena. After a burning exhortation to charity, humility, and perseverance, she exclaims: "Courage, then, sweet Father, let us sleep no longer! As for me, I feel as if I could never again pause or rest. To-day I have received a head in my hands, and in

¹ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 210, q.v.

receiving it have felt a sweetness which the heart cannot understand, the mouth speak, the eye see, nor the ear hear. God has indeed surpassed in this all the other mysteries which preceded it, and which I will not tell you, for fear of making this letter too long. I went to see him of whom you know, and he received from my visit so great strength and consolation that he made his confession, with marvellous good dispositions. He made me promise, for the Love of God, that when the day of justice came I would be with him. And what I promised I performed. In the morning, before the bell began to toll, I went to him and he was greatly comforted. I brought him with me to hear Mass, and he received Holy Communion, which for a long time he had not done. His will was united with the Holy Will of God, and wholly submitted to it. One thing alone he feared : that at the supreme moment his courage might fail him. But the Infinite Goodness of God encouraged him, inflaming him with such love and such desire that his soul could not be satisfied for longing. He said : ‘ Stay with me. Do not leave me, and then all will be well with me, and I shall die content.’ Then I was filled with joy, and perceived as it were the fragrance of his blood mingled with mine, which I desire to shed for the Sweet Spouse Jesus. This desire increased in my soul, and as I felt his fear I said : ‘ Be of good cheer, sweet brother, for soon we shall be at the Marriage Feast Eternal. Thither shalt thou go, bathed in the Sweet Blood of the Son of God, having ever in thy mind the Sweet Name Jesus. And I will wait for thee at the place of execution.’

“ O my Father and my son ! his heart lost all its fear. The sadness of his face was changed into joy, and in his exultation he said : ‘ Whence comes to me such grace, that the Sweetness of my soul will be waiting for me at the holy place of justice ?’ You may see what light he had received, by his calling the place of justice ‘ holy.’ And he added further : ‘ Yes, I will go joyfully and courageously ; and it will seem as though I had a thousand years to wait when I think that you are awaiting me there.’ And he added such sweet words that I marvelled at the Goodness of God. I awaited him then at the place of execu-

tion. And while I waited I prayed, invoking without ceasing the help of the Blessed Mother, and of Catherine, Virgin and Martyr. Before he came I knelt down, and placed my own head on the block, but I obtained not my desire. Earnestly did I pray, invoking our Lady with fervour, saying to her that I desired at the supreme moment light and peace of heart for him ; and for myself, grace to see him enter into his final rest. Then was my soul so inebriated with the sweet promise that was made me that I saw no longer any man, though there was a great crowd.

“ At last he arrived, like a peaceful lamb, and when he saw me he began to smile. He asked me to make the sign of the Cross upon him, and when he had received it I whispered to him : ‘ My sweet brother, let us go to the Eternal Nuptials to rejoice in the Blessed Life that shall never end.’ He laid himself down with sweet gentleness, and I bared his neck. I knelt close beside him, and reminded him of the Blood of the Lamb. His mouth spoke no other words than these : ‘ *Jesus, Catherine !*’ And as he said them, I received his head in my hands.

“ Then I fixed my eyes on the Divine Goodness, saying : ‘ *I will.*’ Immediately I saw, as if in brilliant sunshine, Him Who is God and Man. He was present ; He received that blood. In this blood was the fire of holy desire, kindled by grace in his soul, and this fire was absorbed by the Fire of the Charity Divine. God received his blood, his desire, his soul, placing it all in the Wound in His Side, in the Treasure-house of His Mercy ; showing forth this great truth : that it was by Grace alone and by Mercy that He received it, and by no merit of his own. O ineffable joy ! to see with what Sweetness and Love the Goodness of God awaited that soul separated from its body. How pitifully He looked upon it, when it entered into His Side, all bathed in blood made precious by the Blood of the Son of God ! The Father Almighty received it, and filled it with Power ; the Son, the Eternal Wisdom, the Incarnate Word, communicated to it that burning Love which led Him to a shameful death through obedience to His Father, for the salvation of mankind. Upon that soul was poured forth the Unction of the Holy

Spirit, inundating it with endless joy, and I marvel not, for already he tasted the Divine Sweetness. He turned, as the bride turns when she reaches the threshold of her bridegroom, looking back and saluting those who have accompanied her, thus giving them a last token of thanks.

“When he had disappeared my soul was bathed in an ineffable peace. So sweet to me was the fragrance of that blood that I would not let anyone wash off that which had fallen upon me. Alas ! miserable wretch that I am, I will say no more ! I remain here on earth with great regret, for it seems to me that the first stone of my celestial home is already laid. Be not astonished if I say that I ask nothing better than to see you consumed in the Blood and in the Fire which flow from the Side of the Son of God. No more negligence, my well-beloved sons ! This Blood is our Life.”

No story of any Saint, however exquisite in its human pathos ; however glorious in its Divine courage, can compare with this mystic idyll. To know that what Catherine did for Niccolo di Toldo she would have done for any and every condemned prisoner—that, indeed, she had done as much, saving the supreme act, for many—lessens its perfection not one whit. The impression made by the whole event was tremendous. Caffarini, who was present, says that the spectators felt that they were assisting at a martyrdom rather than an execution ; and that the funeral was like a great religious festival. To the very last Niccolo kept his eyes fixed on Heaven, “with a firm and deliberate gaze,” until it opened to him, and from Catherine’s tender hands, marked with the invisible Stigmata, he passed in one blinding instant through the rain of Blood and Fire into the Eternal Glory of her Crucified Spouse. If no other *Fioretto* of St. Catherine’s life were left to us, this alone would be sufficient to characterize her—the most tenderly human mystic, the most Divinely heroic woman who has ever been counted worthy to be numbered with the Saints.

It has been well said that Catherine’s character has as many facets as a diamond. From the shame and the glory of the martyrdom of the young Perugian noble we must turn to follow her ceaseless activity on behalf of the Vicar

of Christ. It was very shortly after her return to Siena that she wrote again to Gregory XI, who received it at Corneto, a letter which reached him at the same time as the ambassadors from Siena, among whom was one of her earliest disciples, Tommaso di Guelfaccio, who was also the bearer of her letter. The envoys had come to congratulate the Pope upon his return to Italy, and to make submission for the part Siena had taken in the affairs of the League. This, at least, was surely owing to Catherine's influence in her native city. The Saint begs the Pope to remember how easily the Sienese can be "caught by love." "I pray you, take them with this bait," she entreats. She begs him, too, to repress sternly those evil pastors and governors he had set over Christ's flock: "who do those things they should not do." The whole letter is a long litany for peace. But Gregory, with every desire for Catherine's sake to show kindness to the Sienese ambassadors, could not bring himself to promise what they hoped for in plain words. They left his presence, anxious and discouraged.

Their anxiety was well-founded. Early in February the Papal troops—in this case Breton mercenaries, allied with Sir John Hawkwood's men—committed one of the most awful massacres of mediæval, if not of modern times. Instigated by Cardinal Robert of Geneva, the Papal Legate, their commander, they had, to avenge a quarrel caused entirely by their own outrageous behaviour, murdered in cold blood four thousand of the defenceless population of Cesena, with circumstances of indescribable atrocity. Even Hawkwood had remonstrated with the Legate—so soon to become the anti-Pope Clement VII—but the latter insisted. Nor would Gregory, who was entirely innocent of the matter, disavow Robert of Geneva. The revulsion of feeling all over Italy was tremendous. It was said that the days of Nero had returned; and at least one devoutly Catholic scribe wrote that it was enough to take away men's faith in Popes and Cardinals altogether. Was this, they asked, the firstfruits of the supreme Pontiff's rule in Rome?

To Catherine this question must have presented itself with horror. The idea of Gregory's returning to Rome

as a powerful, offended monarch, ready and anxious to wipe out in blood past insults and rebellions, had never occurred to her. She knew the Holy Father personally too well to believe that he was himself guilty of these barbarous deeds ; but she also knew his weakness, and the wickedness of his subordinates. To her, the Ambassador of Peace, it seemed as though this frightful, long-continued war was indeed waged against Almighty God. Again she wrote with passionate earnestness to Gregory :

“ God asks you for Peace, and that as soon as possible. Alas ! how can He wish us to attach ourselves to power, and to things temporal, so that we lose the souls committed to us, and cause these outrages towards God which war inevitably entails . . . Perhaps you will say to me, Holy Father, that you are in conscience obliged to preserve and to recover the property of Holy Church. Alas ! I confess this is true, but it seems to me still better to keep something else even more precious. The true Treasure of the Church is the Blood of Jesus Christ, given as a ransom for souls. This Treasure of Blood was not paid out for temporal things, but for the salvation of the human race. Let us admit that you are bound to regain and preserve your territories, and the lost rights of the Church. Are you not far more bound to regain so many strayed sheep, the Church’s true riches ? . . . Temporal interests can more safely be neglected than spiritual. At least do your best, and God and the world will hold you guiltless. Far more glorious and lasting will be your conquests with the arms of sweetness, love and peace than those gained by the sternness of war ; and thus you will enter into the full possession of your rights, both spiritual and temporal.”

(3)

THE early spring of 1377 found Catherine and her friends at Belcaro, the fine old castle—one of the most picturesquely-situated and difficult of access in the Sienese *contado*—which had been bestowed upon her by Ser Nanni di Vanni in gratitude for what the

Saint had done for him. At her request Gregory XI had given her, at Avignon, the necessary authority to establish there a monastery for women, whose chief employment should be intercession ; and in January she had applied to the *Riformati* of Siena for the equally necessary authorization by the Government. Her practical mind, which in its grasp of great issues never lost sight of details, took great delight in the preparation of the convent where "religious women should constantly pray for the peace of Siena." Unfortunately the foundation was not destined to be lasting. A recent, but already dear friend, the Abbot of St. Antimo, whom Catherine styles "an earthly angel," was the Papal commissary on this occasion, and on the day of the opening of the Convent of St. Mary of the Angels Father William Flete came over from his neighbouring hermitage of Lecceto to sing the first High Mass. During the ceremony took place one of the many miracles which are related concerning St. Catherine's communions, several of which happened at Belcaro.

Though their date can only be fixed approximately, it was probably after her return to Siena on April 25th, 1377, that some of the more awe-inspiring of these marvels occurred. Gregory XI, by a special Bull, had given Catherine permission "to have a priest and a portable altar, so that she could everywhere and always, without any permission, hear Mass and receive Holy Communion." Fra Raimondo had always done his best to obtain her this last great privilege—too often refused her by ignorant or prejudiced priests—since his first meeting with the Saint in 1373. "I used every possible effort to obtain for her the consolation she so much desired," he says. "When she sighed for the Bread of Angels she used to say to me: 'Father, I am hungry; for the Love of God, feed my soul.'" One such marvel took place on the day of their return to Siena from Belcaro. When the little party arrived at the Fullonica—where, by the Pope's permission, she had already arranged the chapel which may still be seen there—the hour of Terce had passed, and Raimondo, perceiving that it was late, and being very tired, did not respond to Catherine's cry: "Father, if only you knew the hunger of my soul!"

Then again she said softly : " I am famished." Then the good priest, moved with compassion, in spite of his weariness confessed her, vested himself, and began the Mass for the Feast of St. Mark. " I consecrated one small Host for her, and when I had communicated, I turned to give her the usual absolution. Her countenance was angelic, and beaming with light. So changed was she that I scarcely recognized her, saying interiorly : ' Is the Lord truly thy faithful and beloved Spouse ? ' And on turning again to the altar I added in my soul : ' Come, Lord, to Thy Spouse.' At the same instant the Sacred Host, before I touched It, moved, and came from more than three fingers' distance to the paten, which I was holding in my hand. I was so much occupied with the light I had seen beaming from Catherine's countenance, and with the movement of the Consecrated Host, which I distinctly saw, that I do not perfectly remember whether It placed Itself on the paten alone, or whether I laid It there. I dare not affirm it, but I think It deposited Itself thereon."

The next miracle is probably antecedent to that just related, says Raimondo, who, however, adds that " the date is not so essential as a truthful account of it." One morning, in spite of unusually severe suffering, Catherine most earnestly desired to communicate, and begged Fra Raimondo to postpone his Mass for a time. To this he willingly agreed. Catherine had reached San Domenico at the hour of Terce, unknown to him, but as it was late her companions had begged her to refrain from receiving Holy Communion that day, on the score of inconvenience to others. The Saint humbly consented, withdrew to the back of the church, and sent a second message to Fra Raimondo, asking him to say Mass as soon as he wished, for she was unable to communicate. Believing her to be at home he immediately began his Mass at the altar of St. Paul, near the choir ; the whole length of the building being between him and St. Catherine. At the first fraction of the Sacred Host, a small Particle appeared to him to fall on the corporal, though—as he believed—on account of the whiteness of the linen he could not see It there. Nor, after his Communion, was the priest able to discover the Particle of the Sacred Host, a fact which

filled him with great confusion and distress, so that he wept. He concluded the Mass, on account of the worshippers who were present, but when it was over, and they had gone away, he again made a minute but unsuccessful search of every portion of the altar, and also of the floor. The size and position of the altar-piece assured him that That which he sought could not have fallen behind it, "although," he says, "I perceived It taking that direction when It escaped from my hands." Full of anguish, he determined to consult the Prior, and bidding the sacristan guard the altar strictly until his return, he went back to the sacristy. At this moment Fra Cristoforo, Prior of the Carthusians, suddenly arrived, having come to beg Fra Raimondo to procure for him an interview with Catherine on important business. The Dominican begged him to wait until he had seen the Prior, but the monk having given the reasons which made it impossible for him to delay, Fra Raimondo accompanied him to the Fullonica, after again warning the sacristan.

Arrived at Catherine's home, he found to his surprise that she had not yet returned from church. The two Religious hastily returned to San Domenico, where they found the Saint in ecstasy, and Raimondo, still greatly shaken, besought her companions to "use every means of making her return to herself." This they did, and Catherine was soon seated in company with the two priests. Fra Raimondo began the interview—doubtless to explain his great distress—by relating his anxiety to Fra Cristoforo, in a low voice. To his astonishment Catherine asked him, smiling: "Did you not search diligently?" and on his earnest affirmative she added: "Why, then, should you be so grievously troubled?" As she still smiled, Raimondo began to feel encouraged, and kept silence while she conversed with the Carthusian, "who went away as soon as he had obtained the desired response." The Dominican, already more tranquillized, said: "Mother, I begin to believe that you took the Particle of my Consecrated Host?" In reply she assured him humbly that it was even so—yet not she, but Another had taken It. Raimondo would not, however, find It again. He placed her under obedience to reveal the truth. Then she said,

after explaining how her friends had asked her to refrain from Communion: "That Particle was brought to me, and given to me, by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. From His own Sacred Hands I received It. Rejoice therefore, because I have from Him this day received grace for which I can never sufficiently thank my Saviour." This explanation, says Raimondo, "changed all sadness into joy." He goes on to relate how many witnesses saw



during Mass on several occasions, the Sacred Host escaping from the hands of the priest, and flying to her mouth. "They told me that this prodigy happened even when I gave her Holy Communion. I own that I never remarked it very closely, only I always perceived a certain trembling in the Consecrated Host when I presented It to her lips. It entered her mouth like a little stone thrown from a distance with force." Fra Bartolommeo declared that when he gave Catherine Holy Communion, he "felt the

Sacred Host escaping, notwithstanding his efforts to hold It." Immediately after receiving, she was always rapt into an ecstasy, and frequently, in this state, raised above the ground. During one of these ecstasies Fra Raimondo heard her speaking softly to herself, and approaching, heard her repeat again and again the words: "*Vidi arcana Dei*"—"I saw the secret things of God."

Long afterwards, when he asked her the meaning of what she had uttered, and why she had not, "as usual," explained it, she told him that to attempt to do so would seem to her to dishonour God by the use of language. "I can only say, I saw unspeakable things." Some idea of these ineffable revelations may be gained by students of the "Dialogue." Here St. Catherine relates how more than once, when Communion had been denied to her, Almighty God united her to Himself in so marvellous and indescribable a manner that the force of her desire raised her body from the ground; and she was conscious of the same exquisite savour—"the fragrance of the Blood"—as after Holy Communion. It is a notable fact that she whose life was one continual fast—for after the age of twenty-six, says Fra Raimondo, she took no solid food at all—had her senses of taste and smell so supernaturally developed that the mystical flavour and fragrance of the Body of Christ was to her an ineffable joy; while on the other hand, the presence of a soul in mortal sin caused her intense physical suffering.

The late summer of 1377 found Catherine and her Little Company—on this occasion, however, a numerous one—first at Montepulciano, when she left Monna Lapa and her friend Cecca, and then at Rocca d'Orcia, one of two great castles occupied by different branches of the Salimbeni family. The two heads of these branches were now engaged in an angry feud, and Catherine had been implored by the ladies of both houses to reconcile the kinsmen Agnolino and Cione. In this she succeeded, after some affectionate correspondence tempered with gentle reproof, and after paying visits both to Rocca d'Orcia and to Castiglioncello.

One very notable thing about the visit to Rocca d'Orcia was the great number of cases of possession by unclean spirits

which the childlike faith of the Tuscan peasants called upon Catherine to exorcise. Fra Raimondi recounts one, and Malavolti two ; though one of the latter, in which a wretched man had been brought to the castle-yard bound by heavy chains and strongly guarded, was proved by Catherine to be harmless. Her gentle kindness restored the poor creature to his senses ; she caused him to be fed and cared for, and declared he was suffering from nothing but weakness. The other two, both terrible cases, as well as several others, " were cured by our Lord Jesus Christ through Catherine's intercession." So strong was the faith of the peasantry in the Saint's power with God that though at first they refused to loose the bonds of one unhappy sufferer who had acted with terrible violence, they agreed to do so if only Catherine would consent to stand beside them during the process.

It has been said that at Rocca d'Orcia St. Catherine learnt miraculously to write. Fra Tommaso Caffarini tells us that one day, finding a pot of cinnabar—the red paint used by mediæval artists to illuminate capital letters—Catherine took up the brush which lay upon it, and began forming characters upon a sheet of paper, which presently took the form of a wonderful prayer to God the Holy Ghost.

The evidence for and against this miracle is most admirably weighed by the learned French Dominican who has recently edited the " Dialogue " of St. Catherine.¹ He proves clearly (1) that all this evidence is referable to Fra Tommaso Caffarini's deposition in the *Processus* of Venice, in 1412 ; (2) that Caffarini was certainly mistaken in attributing to Catherine several pages of the " Dialogue " stated by him to be written by her own hand ; (3) that the four points on which Caffarini relies to prove the miraculous gift of writing are refutable ; (4) that Fra Raimondo da Capua never mentions it, though carefully recording in detail the corresponding miracle of St. Catherine's learning to read ; (5) that the whole question is open to doubt. We may note, moreover, that Fra Tommaso Caffarini was not present at Rocca d'Orcia in 1377.

¹ Rév. Père J. Hurtaud, O.P., S.T.M., *Le Dialogue de Ste. Catherine de Siennæ*. 3me Edition. Paris, 1913. See especially Preface, pp. xxx-li.

The first two of the four points brought forward by Caffarini at Venice in proof of his declaration as to the writing rest on the witness of Stefano Maconi. Now Dom Stefano, then Prior of the Certosa at Pavia, had not mentioned, in his own Deposition, any letters or writings in Catherine's own hand—a curious omission by her principal secretary, if such writings existed. On Caffarini's writing to him, during the course of the *Processus*, to beg him for “a juridical information under oath” in the matter, Dom Stefano, writing under oath as requested, says not a word about the supposed letters, but merely declares that what he had already said was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.¹ Caffarini's third point is that of the two letters said to be written by St. Catherine to Fra Raimondo from Rocca d'Orcia.² Here a point of real interest is raised. The second of these letters, which is unusually long, closes as follows :

“This letter, and another [*i.e.*, a letter describing her contests with the demons] I have written to you, I have written with my own hand here in Rocca d'Orcia, with sighs and tears so abundant that mine eyes could scarcely see to write. As my ignorance deprived me of the consolation of opening my heart in this way to anyone, God enabled me to write, so that when I returned to myself out of ecstasy I could in this way relieve my overburdened heart. He would not give me any respite from the darkness of this life, but miraculously He gave this gift to my mind as a master sets a child his copy . . . Forgive me for having written so long a letter, but my hands and my tongue do not outstrip my heart.”

In this remarkable letter three things are to be noticed : (1) it is a summary of the “Dialogue,” which was written in October, 1378, more than a year later ; (2) that earlier in the letter Catherine refers to letters received from the Holy Father and from Fra Raimondo, which have consoled her in some degree for the bitterness of soul which

¹ Caffarini declared that Stefano had told him that Catherine had written to him the first letter she ever wrote with her own hand ; that he possessed that, and other MSS. of the Saint ; and also, that many of her letters and autographs were preserved in the Certosa of Pontignano. These precious documents have never been found.

² Gigli, *Lettere*, 89, 90.

she felt on the Feast of St. Francis (October 4th) on hearing of the terrible blow that had fallen upon the Church. This is the Great Schism, which began on September 20th, 1378; (3) that this particular letter has been already closed *before* the paragraph just quoted concludes the whole epistle. Catherine's "sign-manual" has been appended to the long treatise which is really the *resumé* of the "Dialogue"; and the words: "*Altro non dico*"—"I say no more." Then follows the detailed statement of the miraculous gift of writing. Père Hurtaud proves that whether or not this concluding paragraph is genuine—and he leaves it an open question—it is perfectly evident that the main body of this important letter was written in October, 1378, and not in 1377; and that the final paragraph is (a) either erroneously inserted here from another letter; or (b) is an interpolation of later date by an enthusiast anxious to prove the truth of Caffarini's statement. These points become manifest when the letter is studied as a whole—it is far too long for quotation here—and if proof be needed that the paragraph in question is an interpolation, it may be suggested that St. Catherine would scarcely have waited a whole year before employing her new-found gift in writing to her confessor. The question is of the utmost importance, for this paragraph contains the one known statement attributed to St. Catherine, that she had learnt to write by a miracle.

The fourth point brought forward by Caffarini is the "cinnabar writing." But this priceless document, like every other MS. or autograph of St. Catherine, has never been traced, never found. Nowhere does the good Friar himself claim to have seen Catherine write. He only states it as a fact, of which all the *onus probandi* rests upon himself. "This indefatigable apostle of Catherine," concludes the French critic, "who preached scarcely anything but the life and doctrine of the Saint, was assuredly led into believing what he wished to be true, without sufficiently examining the evidence on which his own was grounded." His own good faith is, of course, intact and unassailable. This point has been dwelt upon at some length because no other biographer of St. Catherine seems to have noticed the discrepancies pointed

out by Père Hurtaud. The Saint is glorified by so many miracles that it is well to weigh the evidence against this doubtful one.

It was to Rocca d'Orcia that Fra Simone da Cortona, the young Dominican who had become one of Catherine's disciples during the plague of 1374, addressed to Neri di Landoccio two letters in which his natural sensitiveness of soul betrays itself in depression and actual morbidity. He declared himself no longer worthy to belong to the "Fellowship." So miserable was he that he even refused to sign his name—heading both letters, however, with his initials. To the poor young Friar, Catherine's letter in reply, perhaps accompanying one from Neri, perhaps instead of it, must have come like a whiff of fresh, sweet air into the heavy atmosphere of a sick-room. Her splendid optimism defies all morbid broodings. The watchword of the letter is ; "Fight." But as no one can fight for the Truth without light, he must free himself from the clouds and darkness of self-love, "which deprive us of all light, spiritual and temporal. In order that Simone may run to the field of battle, there to fight manfully, like a true knight, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, rejoicing in the midst of his combats, he must have the true Light, and wipe from his eyes all the dust of earthly affections." Very tenderly the Saint points out some of the difficulties this hyper-sensitive soul will encounter. "Sometimes God permits us to be persecuted by the world, slandered by men, or obliged to obey some distasteful order of our Superior." Then we complain of this. Why ? Because of our lack of Light ; "because self-love has filled the eye of Faith with dust again ; and if the devil attacks us our blinded eyes cannot see through the evil thoughts which the enemy suggests to us, and we think God has rejected us. Then our courage gives way, and we give up prayer, because we think it will no longer be heard ; we feel disgusted with ourselves because we have become slack and disheartened ; obedience weighs heavy on our shoulders, our cell is neglected, and we attempt to console ourselves with external things." Again and again she reminds him of the Precious Blood. "How best can you fight ? In the Light of the Most

Holy Faith, which you will find in the Sweet Blood. What causes the Light? The Fire of Ineffable Love, which you will find in the Blood . . . Thus, he who loves, fears God and serves his neighbour; he becomes a generous knight who fights with the shield of Faith, with the two-edged sword of Love . . . He seeks with burning love the honour of God and the salvation of souls. Where has he found these holy desires? In the Precious Blood. They are not to be found anywhere else. Thus have I told you that I desire to see you bathed, drowned in the Blood of Jesus Crucified, and I tell you that then I will call you my son, and indeed you will be my son."

"*Viriliter age*" was a maxim Catherine never ceased to impress upon her disciples; but their best incentive to courage was her own shining example. She gave at this time a great proof of it, for she separated herself from Fra Raimondo, who of all her confessors was the most helpful to her soul, sending him to Rome some time during the autumn of 1377, from Rocca d'Orcia, on a mission to Pope Gregory XI. He was the bearer of certain suggestions "which would have been most useful for Holy Church had they been properly understood." On his arrival at Rome the Master-General appointed him to his former office as Prior of the Minerva. Thus, excepting for a very brief part of the time which Catherine spent in Rome, the friends never met again. The whole of the summer and early autumn were spent by Catherine in visits to various castles and convents of the *contado*—journeys by no means without risk, often from the very nature of the country traversed, sometimes from brigands, sometimes even from evil spirits. Fra Raimondo relates one such story, which, though it evidently took place a year or two earlier, may well be repeated here. He gives it as an instance of the persecutions which Catherine endured from Satan.

"We were returning to Siena one day when she was suddenly thrown from the ass on which she was riding, into a deep ravine. I ran, invoking the Blessed Virgin, and found her on the ground laughing, and saying: 'That was a blow from *Malatasca*'—meaning Satan." Again she

mounted her ass, but in a few minutes she was again thrown off, and this time the animal fell upon her. Once more she made a jest of it ; but the Friars would not suffer her to ride any more. " We wished her to walk in the midst of us. Her enemy was not yet vanquished. He dragged her this way and that, and if we had not held her up she would certainly have been thrown down again.



And ever she continued to rally the Evil One upon his impotence."

Rocca d'Orcia was Catherine's headquarters until nearly the end of 1377, in spite of many and bitter complaints from the *Riformati* of Siena, who viewed with great suspicion her continued absences from the city, and who professed to believe that she was plotting against the government with the Salimbeni. Monna Lapa, who wanted her daughter in Siena, was very querulous ; and from the

mother of one of her "sons," Madonna Rabes Tolomei, came an angry message to Fra Matteo, the young Dominican, bidding him return at once from the stronghold of the hereditary enemies of his family, and threatening him with her curse if he stayed away any longer. Catherine probably returned to Siena in Advent, 1377. But her stay was short, for at the beginning of 1378 she received a letter from Fra Raimondo at Rome, bidding her in the name of the Holy Father to betake herself once more to Florence.

Gregory was, in fact, very much annoyed with Catherine; and a greater proof could hardly be given of the weakness of his character. He disapproved of her having spent so long in the country when she might, in his opinion, have been doing more useful work in Florence. He evidently depended on her far more than he knew; and his anger had been only partly appeased by the very beautiful and humble letter the Saint had written to him through Raimondo from Rocca d'Orcia, begging him to forgive her for the faults she had unintentionally committed.

"Most Holy Father," wrote the Saint, "look in the Light of Reason and Faith at that with which you reproach me, not to punish me, but to pity me. To whom can I turn if you abandon me? To whom can I fly for help, who will be my refuge, if you drive me away? My persecutors follow me, and I take shelter with you, together with all the other servants and children of God. If you abandon me, in irritation and indignation against me, I will hide myself in the wounds of Jesus Crucified, Whose Vicar you are, knowing that He will receive me, because He willeth not the death of a sinner. So, when He receives me, you will no longer drive me away, and we will remain at our posts together, to fight generously . . . for the Sweet Spouse of Christ . . . If everyone in the world drives me forth my heart shall not fear, but weeping and suffering, I will rest on the heart of the Bride. Forgive me, *dolcissimo, santissimo Babbo mio*, all my ignorance, and the offences I have committed against God and against your Holiness. The Eternal Truth Himself pardons and reassures me. Very humbly I ask your blessing."

The Florentines were making it increasingly difficult for

Gregory to sign the desired peace. In October, 1377, they had achieved a great victory over the Pope's mercenaries, upon the breaking-off of the peace negotiations after the pronouncement at Anagni in August. The Florentine ambassadors, making a final attempt for peace, had sought the Pope in his summer retreat, but had come away after protracted negotiations, confirmed in the opinion that it was impossible to accept the Pope's terms. The Interdict was now formally disregarded; Mass was everywhere said publicly, and the whole city was in a state of open rebellion. Personal feeling against the Holy Father was indescribably bitter. So well was Gregory aware of this that he refused Fra Raimondo's offer to go himself as the Pope's ambassador, for he knew the Dominican's life would be in danger. "I am told," he said to Raimondo, "that if Catherine of Siena goes to Florence she will obtain peace. They will not harm her, for they hold her in reverence, and she is a woman." Thus, on receiving the Papal Mandate, Catherine, "true daughter of Obedience," started at once for the rebellious city.

Gregory XI had been reduced to the most pitiful straits by lack of money, and was now in the greatest pecuniary difficulties. We find him at this time actually begging a loan from Queen Giovanna of Naples in words which almost compel tears. In truth he was in a desperate position, and where a stronger man would have adopted a simple, dignified policy of reconciliation, redressing the grievances of the unfortunate rebels, while insisting on due and proper submission, Gregory still held out. Raimondo tells us that "the Sovereign Pontiff of Rome, who commanded in Italy sixty episcopal cities and a thousand fortified places was reduced to a few paltry and meagre strips of land." At this juncture, just as a proposal had been made by Florence that a Council for Peace should be held in some neutral city, Gregory himself took the desperate step of appealing to Bernabo Visconti—the originator of the whole trouble—and actually proposed this man as arbitrator in the Peace Conference, which it was decided to hold at Sarzana.

In deference to the Pope's wishes, Catherine, when she

arrived at Florence in March, 1378, had in her party no priests except Fra Santi, the aged hermit who had now twice owed his life to her intercession. She was further accompanied by Stefano, Neri, and a couple of her devoted women friends. Already she had been able to accomplish something of the Pope's purpose as regarded the *Parte Guelfa*, and had raised a storm of jealous indignation in the opposing party; already the Peace Conference was in full session at Sarzana. Then, "on the evening of March 27th . . . there came a knocking at the Porta San Frediano, and a cry: '*Open quickly to the Messenger of Peace.*' The guards drew back the bolts, but saw no one. But the cry spread through the city: '*The olive has come, the Peace is made.*' Men . . . began to illuminate the city . . . A few days later the news reached Florence that Pope Gregory had died at that very hour. Men said that it was the Angel of God that had come, but was it not rather the Pope's own unquiet ghost, seeking a reconciliation with the city that he had cast out of the bosom of the Church?"¹

¹ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

CHAPTER V

THE RENDING OF THE
SEAMLESS GARMENT

(1378)

(I)

THE first cause of any historical event is almost always an intellectual one. When the event concerns the Church, the question is theological. Thus, before discussing the Papal election of the fatal year 1378 it will be well briefly to consider the general state of Christendom at the opening of the period of the Great Schism, when religion was "a mental and social force which we, in spite of the petulant acerbities of modern theological controversies, have difficulty in realizing."¹

Nearly all European countries, from Ireland to Iceland, from Castile to Scotland, were under the obedience of Peter; and the discovery of Greenland by Irish monks had added another treasure to the Dowry. There, in that mysterious, unknown Polar country, flourished the earliest Church of North America; too soon (1520) to succumb to the attacks of nameless barbarians. The North of Europe—Norway, Livonia, Prussia, with Hungary and Poland as "the spear and buckler of Christianity," was wholly Catholic. Further south, the Eastern Empire was slowly and miserably decaying; more and more powerless to resist the forces of Islamism it was tottering onwards to the final awful catastrophe of 1453. In Asia and Africa the religion of Mahomet was progressing rapidly. The missions of the *Fratres Peregrinantes propter Christum*, so richly and fruitfully begun (1254) in China, India and Central Asia, were now choked with the Nestorian heresy, and smothered beneath its weeds. Between Paganism and Islamism Africa was in an apparently hopeless condition, but at least three of the Avignon Popes had done their best to keep the Faith alive in Abyssinia. "When the registers of Clement V,

¹ Thorold, *Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, Introduction, p. 4.

John XXII, and Clement VI are published the world will know what they tried to do in this matter ; though the results obtained by no means corresponded with the greatness and generosity of the sacrifices rendered."

Two things above all paralysed the activities of the Christian world, and prevented Catholics from acting unitedly, forcibly, effectively against the deadly danger of Islamism. The first of these was to be found in Byzantium, the second in Rome itself.

Constantinople was, as it had ever been, a prey to all the divisions and rebellions of a Schism. The more the average man studies the history of the ill-fated Eastern Empire, now rotten to the core, the more impossible does he find it to understand—or even to attempt to follow—the silly complexities, the childish straw-splitting of the Byzantines of the fourteenth century ; who consumed themselves in ritual puerilities and casuistic subtleties while the Turks, unopposed, encamped on the other side of the Bosphorus. The Eastern Church was now actively in schism, though, thanks to the noble and heroic exertions of Cardinal Bessarion, " that greatest Greek of all," it was temporarily reconciled at Florence in 1439. The unbiassed student will certainly arrive at one conclusion : the men whose policy right through the centuries was based on that watchword of their " independence " : " Rather the turban than the tiara," deserved all they suffered. It is obvious that the religious policy of Byzantium was largely influenced by political jealousy. Rome was finally lost, with the Western Empire, to the Emperor of the East. The Pope sat enthroned in Rome—at least theoretically—and his powerful temporal protector was the ruler of Middle Europe, the successor of that Charlemagne in whom Pope Leo III had founded the Holy Roman Empire five centuries and a half earlier. But the Greek mind was too illogical to be capable of assimilating direct facts and their issues. The Byzantines argued tiny points of scholastic theology and insignificant diversities of literature ; and the only important matter at issue among them was the Supremacy of Peter. Occasional " reunions " had indeed been patched up by the Comneni and Paleologi, taking advantage of the good faith of the

Popes ; but these were ephemeral, broken by treason as soon as formed. In 1378 the Byzantine Empire was already the "sick man" of Europe. Awful as was the cataclysm of 1453 it was the fitting climax to the history of the blind, foolish casuists who could break the unity of Christendom for the sake of a Greek particle ; and who, though disunited among themselves on almost every other point, were yet firmly united against Rome.

Far more important, because still remediable, was that cause of paralysis to be found in Rome itself. For more than seventy years the Pope had been absent from the Eternal City, where the revolutionary spirit was now rampant. Humanly speaking, there was much to be said in favour of Avignon as the Papal residence. But the absence of the Supreme Pontiff, the determined closing of his eyes to the Roman disorders had only increased the trouble. It seems at times, to our cooler northern brain, as if the Romans had gone mad. At best, they were utterly unrestrained—the souls and minds of insanely spoilt children in the bodies of formidable men and women, ignorant, shameless, brutal, yet with a certain childlike simplicity in spite of their cunning which is their chief redeeming trait. Like all spoilt children, they were only good as long as they had what they wanted. "We see them offering from time to time the sincerest homage to emperors and tribunes, to despots and anarchists, till at last, disabused of their errors, they clamour with repentant cries for the return of the Pope." St. Bernard said no more than the truth when he exclaimed to Pope Eugenius III : "What is better known than the arrogance and pride of the Romans ? Strangers to peace, and accustomed to revolt, recalcitrant and intractable, they have up to the present time only obeyed when they could no longer resist." What was true of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries was proved to the hilt at the end of the fourteenth century. In 1376 a witty French scribe had written : "It is because of the shortcomings and sins of the Romans that our Lord has preferred France . . . Nine times have the Popes been driven from the Eternal City ; nine times have our kings established them there again. France is the refuge of the Popes, Rome is their

ruin. These incorrigible pagans are the impenitent descendants of the murderers of St. Peter and St. Paul ! ”

That these words were literally true is amply verified by the events of 1378. For in considering the beginning of the Great Schism it must never be forgotten that had the Cardinals not been in danger of their lives from these very Romans they would never have compromised by electing Urban VI, and the sad consequences arising from that valid but unfortunate election could never have taken place. But “ to understand the state of Europe at any given period it is necessary to understand the state of soul of the individuals who happened at the time to be the political stakeholders.”¹ A word must thus be said concerning the intellectual and learned world, whose lead the nations followed. The wit who said of the Church of the *Quattrocento* : “ She has no doctrine because she has too much doctrine,” compressed into an epigram the whole trouble now working like leaven among the universities and great centres of European learning ; and which was to prove so potent a factor in the Schism. A distinctive mark of the fourteenth century is its extraordinary ignorance of the Pontifical power, with its basis, forces and privileges. The very constitution of the spiritual sovereignty of St. Peter was practically forgotten. In the preceding century St. Thomas Aquinas had providentially been designed to unite and mould into the one great whole of his magnificent *Summa* all the principles and points of doctrine generally admitted by the ancient doctors. Unfortunately he had had no successor. Thus the students of the day were full of strange propositions and ideas about the power of the Church. “ There is scarcely an error since condemned that does not find its place in the decadent theology of some newly-made Doctor, more concerned with novelty than truth.” Though many of these errors were negative, or obscurely stated for fear of censure, they are still perceptible. “ Almost all the errors about the hierarchy since condemned by the Church,” says Salembier, “ were born or developed through that lamentable period. These doctrines have destroyed the true conception of the Papacy and of Councils in many

¹ Thorold, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 3.

minds ; and they have more than once caused grave misapprehensions as to the necessarily subordinate situation of the clergy and the faithful as regards authority." It was, in fact, the spirit of the Renaissance which was rising throughout the world, like sap in a tree in spring ; the spirit of that movement which ought to have brought forth nothing but beauty and holiness, which began with Petrarch and the earliest Humanists and ended amid the somewhat artificial splendours of the semi-pagan court of the last Medici Pope.

It is regrettable that it should have been a Dominican professor, Jean de Paris, who first attacked the idea of the Temporal Power founded by Gregory the Great. A few years later William of Occam and his quarrelsome and rebellious Franciscan followers, in dispute with Pope John XXII, were to cry to the Emperor : " Defend us with the sword and we will defend you with the pen." It was Thierry de Niem who first uttered the heretical statement which the Gallican Church was later to make her own : " A General Council is superior to the Pope." The most audacious Hussites and Protestants have scarcely surpassed these theologians of Paris in their more erroneous arguments, in which not only the limits but even the origin of the Papal rights are contested. The direct fruit of Occam's theories in England was the revolt of Wiclif, St. Catherine's contemporary, who died in 1384, when the heir of his fatal doctrine, John Hus, was beginning his studies in Prague. The religious world was already tasting the poison of a certain erotic mysticism all the more dangerous because it was difficult to differentiate between the false and the true. In many quarters the doctrines of the Fraticelli had great influence—a so-called mystical philosophy of which the predominant idea was that a new Revelation of the Holy Spirit was to be made, to supersede the Dispensation of the Eternal Son.

Between such men as these, and that General of the Augustinians who said that the Pope himself did not know where his own power ended, lay a bewildering maze of doctrinal excesses. " Some called the Pope anti-Christ, others, a demi-god." The traditional blow of Colonna's iron gauntlet across the dauntless face of Boniface VIII

at Anagni, in 1303, was the first insult by the temporal power of the world to that of the Church; for in the Supreme Pontiff, defenceless in the hands of his brutal captors, the theological doctrine of the indirect power of the Popes over kings and kingdoms was attacked.

From the disciplinary and moral point of view more will be said when, in considering the "Dialogue," the appalling corruption of the Church will be described in St. Catherine's own words. The three active forces working as contributory causes towards the Schism were (1) the systematic opposition made in ecclesiastical quarters to any scheme of thorough reform. In that regard St. Bernard had not spared Pope Eugenius III. St. Elizabeth of Hungary had predicted the coming spoliation of the Church on account of the excessive riches of the clergy. While on all hands it was admitted that reform was not only advisable but necessary, no Pope as yet had had the courage to become the reformer. (2) The second force, as so clearly emphasized in the Life of St. Catherine, was the useless wars which devastated Europe, and the existence of roving troops of godless free-lances, who terrorized all civilized kingdoms so that men feared to practise their religion; while a third, and very important point was (3) that of Pontifical taxes. Nepotism was the evil most common among ecclesiastics of the *Quattrocento*, beginning with the Pope himself. During a monastic vacancy the material interests of an abbey would be conferred on a rich layman, who possessed influence. Even regular benefices were often thus conferred. The Avignonnais Popes extended this practice. But such Pontiffs as Clement V and Benedict XII soon proved it was easier to make such wounds than to heal them—to say nothing of the remaining scar. In the fourteenth century every Pope was asking for all the money he could get. We have seen Gregory XI applying as a suppliant for funds to the notorious Queen Giovanna. "To increase their power and influence the Popes, especially those of Avignon, put into abbatial stalls men whom the casque would have suited better than the mitre." Such were Cardinal Robert of Geneva, and the arrogant Abbot of Marmoutier, Gérard du Puy. Later on certain *protégés* of the Pope

actually favoured the Schism on which their simoniacal interests depended.

These are facts which it is useless to disguise ; for the Church will best be served by Truth. No one was more keenly alive to these scandals, more fearless in denouncing them, than St. Catherine herself. They affected very deeply the respect of the people for the Church, and for the Religious Orders ; though the keen mediæval mind could always distinguish between the office and the individual. A celebrated historian writes : " The financial system adopted at Avignon has contributed more than is generally believed to destroy the prestige of the Papacy, and has singularly facilitated the task of our enemies."¹ These considerations help us at least to understand the unjustifiable proceedings of Wiclif and Hus ; to realize how Martin Luther—before whose blatant vapourings the last flickering sparks of Mediævalism died out for ever—could attempt, in bad faith, and with all the arrogance of self-righteousness to reform from without that Church which apparently could never be reformed from within.

This, then, was the condition of Christendom when, at the death of Pope Gregory XI, sixteen Cardinals met in conclave at the Vatican to elect his successor. It was the first election held in Rome for seventy-five years. Stringent regulations had been laid down by the deceased Pontiff in his will, to make it sure and safe. He had decided that an absolute majority of votes should be sufficient for an election ; and had left directions that the commandant of Sant' Angelo—the fortress which was the key to St. Peter's and the Papal Palace—should not permit the entrance of any claimant except by the express orders of six Cardinals of Avignon. In the city itself one subject, second only in importance to the greatest of all, was discussed : Would the new Pope remain or return ? Would it be Rome or Avignon—Italian ground or French ? The Trastevere, already wild with excitement, shouted openly that since France had spent Roman gold for seventy years it was now the turn of Rome to spend French gold. In fact, the citizens had come to believe that they had a perfect right to assist in—if not to interfere with—ponti-

¹ Pastor, *Histoire des Papes*, i, p. 87. Paris, 1888.

fical elections. To their limited understandings the election of a Pope in Rome was a local, or at most a national, affair. Thus, fearing that after all, once elected, the Pope would escape from their hands and return to Avignon (as they phrased it), they determined to do all in their power to retain him. Bands of ruffians from the Sabine Hills—mere brigands—thronged into the city day by day, awaiting the moment when, the decision being made known, they would be free, according to their outrageous custom, to pillage the residence of the newly-appointed Pope. The nobles, who should have restrained them, refused to do so. Anarchy and confusion reigned supreme. The Cardinals themselves professed to feel a confidence far from justified by events. True Romans, they declared, would never hurt them, or attempt to interfere with their liberty of act and speech.

Of the sixteen Cardinals then in Rome—it will be remembered that six had remained at Avignon, while the Cardinal of Amiens was at the Peace Conference at Sarzana—four only were Italian. Six were Limousin, four French—the distinction is obvious—while the remaining two were undecided as to which party to attach themselves.¹ But the French and Italian Cardinals had decided at all costs to keep out the Limousins.

On Wednesday in Passion Week, April 7th, 1377, the Cardinals entered the conclave. But the precautions taken to exclude the public were not sufficient to keep out certain wild and excited Romans who entered with them, and rushed madly about the Vatican loudly proclaiming their intention of massacring the entire Sacred College if a Roman Cardinal was not elected. Cardinal d'Aigrefeuille, supported by Cardinal Orsini, himself a Roman noble, answered them as they deserved, and bade them depart. Finally the Vatican was cleared, the doors sealed, and the electors left in private, though not in peace, for the Piazza di San Pietro was black with an angry and

¹ The four Italian Cardinals were : Tebaldeschi, Cardinal of St. Peter's, the *doyen* of the Sacred College, a very aged and infirm man ; Corsini of Florence ; Orsini (Protector of Siena) ; and Borzano, Cardinal of Milan. Amongst the Limousins were Cardinals du Puy and d'Aigrefeuille, and (in public opinion) de Noëlet of Sant' Angelo. The French or "Gallican" Cardinals were led by Robert of Geneva, and to this party adhered Pedro de Luna.

threatening mob, shouting ominously : "*Romano lo volemo : o, al manco, Italiano*"—"We will have a Roman, or at least an Italian !" That night the mob, generously assisted by the Sabine brigands, broke into the Vatican cellars and drank itself into a dangerous state of excitement which, as day dawned, increased rather than abated.

On that morning, April 8th, as the Cardinals, having heard Mass, were sitting in conclave, their deliberations were disturbed by the frantic ringing of the tocsin. All Rome was in an uproar. The sea of half-maddened men surged over the Piazza and round the Vatican with deafening yells of "*Romano lo volemo.*"

It is said that Prignano's name had been on the lips of many of the electors before they entered the Vatican. But when the Guardian of the conclave, the Bishop of Marseilles, rushed into the hall, imploring them to hasten the election or the Romans would break in and murder them all ; when even Cardinal Orsini's appeal to the mob failed in its effect, it was felt that a decisive moment had arrived. It was Pedro de Luna who begged the Cardinal of Limoges to vote for Prignano. Cardinal de Cros arose, and said : "My Lords, since God will not let us agree upon a member of the Sacred College, we must choose a Pope from outside it. I see no one so worthy as the Archbishop of Bari (Acerenza). He is a holy man, known to us all, of ripe age and sufficient knowledge. I name him freely and spontaneously." Another Limousin, Cardinal d'Aigrefeuille, cried : "I choose Prignano as Pontiff of Rome !" Almost all present followed this example. A few hesitated, but eventually agreed. Orsini alone protested that they were not sufficiently free to make the election valid. Bartolommeo Prignano, Archbishop of Acerenza, whom we have already met at Avignon, was thus elected by acclamation ; Pedro de Luna and a large majority of the electors affirming later that they chose Prignano with the solemn intention that he should become Pope.

Of all this, of course, the Archbishop was in complete ignorance. Though not a Roman he was an Italian, of Neapolitan birth, and the Guardian-Bishop sent him a hasty message to present himself at once at the Vatican,

together with a number of other prelates, that the mob might guess nothing beforehand. Meanwhile the conclave adjourned for the Cardinals to breakfast, and when the meal was over, amid the raging cries from the Piazza : "*Romano lo volemo*," one of the Cardinals suggested that the Sacred College should profit by this brief respite, and proceed to re-elect the Archbishop of Acerenza. Thirteen out of the sixteen agreed to this, and proceeded to re-elect Prignano unanimously in the chapel. Even supposing the first election was invalid through fear, this at least was deliberate and voluntary.

By this time the people were trying to break into the Vatican, and the unfortunate Cardinals began to wonder whether the choice of Prignano would really satisfy them ! Cardinal Orsini went to a window, and shouted to the howling, raging mob : "You have a Pope." He mentioned no name, but immediately the air resounded with shouts as the Romans vociferated various names, of which, perhaps, the loudest was Tebaldeschi. At this moment the doors gave way, the shouting, drunken populace rushed the Vatican, stones were freely thrown and several Cardinals wounded, while the mob threatened to murder them all if the election proved not to their liking. A chaplain who was present appealed to Cardinal Tebaldeschi to save the lives of his colleagues. A white mitre was put on his head, a red cope cast round him, and the poor old man was placed upon the altar, energetically but feebly protesting : "I am not the Pope ; he is the Archbishop of Bari !" No one, however, paid any heed to his cries, and the people being apparently satisfied, the situation was for the moment saved.

This was the scene—one of the most disgraceful in history—which met the astonished gaze of Prignano on his arrival at the Vatican. He was hastily informed of what had taken place, and—the palace having been now somewhat cleared—a few of the Cardinals, literally ashamed to face the revelation of their own weakness, begged him to renounce the tiara. This, however, he declined to do, to the relief of the majority ; and thus, having been (twice) elected by a majority, according to the Will of Gregory XI, he was evidently the true Pope. The Cardinals, how-

ever, made haste to escape from a place where their lives were in real danger. Six took refuge in Sant' Angelo; four left Rome altogether—Tebaldeschi was almost the only Cardinal who remained with the new Pontiff, who took the name of Urban VI. The people, though angry at the deception practised on them, were delighted that the new Pope was at least Italian, and there, for the moment, the matter rested.

Urban VI was elected in fear, but not through fear. The whole pitiful compromise is a curious mixture of tragic courage and cowardice. It may well be asked why the Cardinals did not at once say they had been forced into electing Prignano, if this had really been the case? They did nothing of the sort. All, including the six in Sant' Angelo, came to do homage to the new Pope. Sore and angry though the Limousins were, they joined with the rest in reassuring Urban VI as to his election; though afterwards they gave a very different version of the same facts, and were contradicted by Cardinal de Noëlle. On this occasion they all recognized him solemnly, Cardinal Corsini saying: "My Lord, we have chosen thee." After the enthronement, adoration, and singing of the *Te Deum*, a Limousin Cardinal opened a window and cried to the waiting crowd: "I announce to you a great joy. You have a Pope, who has taken the name of Urban VI." No dissentient voice was heard. On April 18th, Easter Sunday, the new Pope was solemnly crowned at St. Peter's, Cardinal Orsini himself placing the triple tiara on his head. Pedro de Luna had already taken upon himself the responsibility of the election, and, with Robert of Geneva, was Urban's warmest supporter. The Spanish Cardinal indeed declared that the Romans might tear him in pieces before he would go back upon the election.

One thing at least stands out clearly. It was not until they began to wish they had chosen someone else, for reasons that will presently appear, that the Cardinals expressed any doubt as to the validity of Urban's election. On the day following his coronation the election was announced to the Cardinals at Avignon; on May 8th the news was sent to the Emperor, and to all other Catholic

Sovereigns. Robert of Geneva—the butcher of Cesena and future anti-pope—had written himself to Charles V of France. Pedro de Luna wrote to Spain, and always used the *Oratio pro Papa*, in Mass, for Urban.

The Cardinals at Avignon wrote courteously to Urban VI, sending their homage. In all the twenty-three members of the Sacred College there was not one dissident. It seemed as if at last peace would be restored to the Church, for the new Pope's austerity and excellent personal character were well-known; and men were reassured by remembering that as Chancellor he had been a wise and able statesman. He had decided to remain at Rome, therefore the populace was satisfied. It was the calm before the storm.

This is not the place to attempt a disquisition on the merits of this much-disputed election. But it is absolutely necessary for the historian of St. Catherine to present all the facts, as they are known, as clearly and succinctly as possible, in order that her attitude during her remaining years may be understood. All the facts here related, and many more details, she heard from Fra Raimondo, who, as Prior of the Minerva, was in Rome throughout these troublous days. Catherine, of course, was still in Florence, whither we shall now follow her; for though the events which led to the Great Schism followed with startling rapidity upon the election of Urban, they were contemporaneous with Catherine's important mission to the Florentines, which may well be dealt with first.

While, however, St. Catherine was straining every nerve to bring about peace between the rebellious city and the Holy Father, filled as she was with fresh hope at the accession of a new Pope who was at least an Italian, and who had no personal *animus* against the Florentines, the Limousin Cardinals, in conjunction with the six at Avignon, had already begun to warn the Catholic princes, especially Charles V, to distrust the official declarations recently made in Urban's name. No definite communication from Rome disallowed or vetoed these proceedings, in which is seen with terrible clearness the moral and spiritual state of even great ecclesiastics of those days.

The Limousin Cardinals desired ardently to keep the Papal power centred at Avignon. To do this they were prepared to forswear themselves shamelessly ; to risk the perils of Schism ; and, for the sake of temporal and political power to go as far as to endanger the safety, if not the existence, of the Barque of Peter.

(2)

THE friend upon whose influence with his fellow-citizens in Florence St. Catherine chiefly relied was her old correspondent and disciple Niccolo Soderini, a member of the Signoria. Fra Raimondo tells us that before leaving Tuscany in the autumn of 1377, he had an interview with Soderini, "a man most faithful to God and the Church, and strongly attached to Catherine. We had spoken of the affairs of the Republic, and in particular of the ill-will of those who pretended to desire reconciliation with the Church, and who did all they could to prevent peace. As I complained of this conduct that excellent man answered me thus : ' You may be sure that the people of Florence and every honest man in the town desire peace, but the obstinate hearts of some among our governors are the obstacle.' I replied : ' Is there no remedy for this evil ? ' He answered : ' Yes, if some of the influential citizens took to heart the cause of God, and had an understanding with the Guelfs, in order to deprive those intermeddlers of their power, for they are enemies of the public good. If four or five of them could be removed, the thing would be done.' When I went to fulfil my commission to the Sovereign Pontiff I related to Him the conversation which I had held with Niccolo Soderini." It was doubtless in consequence of this conversation that Pope Gregory, as we have seen, sent Catherine to Florence a few months later. " I am told," said the Holy Father to Raimondo, " that if Catherine of Siena repairs to Florence, peace will be concluded."

Fra Raimondo was bidden to draw up the necessary authorizations, which the Pope signed next day, and

Catherine immediately departed. "Arrived at Florence," says Raimondo, "she was received with much honour by those who had remained faithful to God and to the Church, and with the aid of Niccolo Soderini she held conferences with the well-disposed citizens, whom she persuaded no longer to offer opposition to . . . the Vicar of Christ. She was also able to confer with the Guelfs, and to lead them to understand that those who stirred up division between the Father and the children ought to be deprived of their functions ; that they were rather the destroyers of the citizens than their governors ; and that peace was not only necessary to preserve their lives and their goods, but it was indispensable to their souls' salvation. They had actively contributed to stripping the Church of her incontestable rights and . . . ought before God and for conscience' sake to make restitution of what they had taken, or caused to be taken by others. The chief of the party and a great number of good citizens submitted to these representations, begging the government to labour for peace—not in words, merely, but by prompt and energetic deeds."

It is at Florence that we find for the first time in her history real criticism of St. Catherine's actions. From the beginning she had suffered from those who did not understand her mission, and from "bacbyters," and more recently from the cruel tongues of those who, secure in their own perfections, considered it unseemly for a girl of Catherine's age to live surrounded by priests and young laymen, and to be constantly travelling in their company. In other words all criticism up till now had been chiefly the outcome of one form or another of personal jealousy. But the attitude of a section of the Florentines was different. A very large proportion of the *Parte Guelfa* was indignant that a woman should thus be accredited by the Pope to interfere in their affairs. They spoke against her character, and openly denounced her "hypocrisy." The Eight of War, who knew their term of office would be ended as soon as peace was declared, did their best to discredit her, and misinterpret her political advice ; so that Catherine's task was by no means an easy one. One of the Guelf leaders, Piero Canigiani, who was building a

house for "his beloved Catherine," came in for much ridicule. This man, a wealthy and powerful citizen, the father of Ristoro (to whom Catherine addressed that most wonderful series of letters of direction to a layman), and Barduccio (who now met the Saint for the first time), was perhaps as influential as Soderini. He willingly consented that Barduccio, who was a delicate fragile youth, should become one of Catherine's family and her third secretary. Henceforth Barduccio never left her. Young as he was, he had, says Fra Raimondo, "the wisdom of old age, and was adorned with every virtue. He left parents, brothers, and country to follow Catherine to Rome, and there he remained until her death. In her last moments Catherine enjoined on him to attach himself to me, and place himself under my direction. This she did without doubt because she knew he had not long to live; in fact, shortly after, he fell into a decline, and . . . it soon became evident his case was hopeless. Fearing that the air of Rome was hurtful to him I sent him to Siena, where he fell asleep peacefully in the Lord." (December, 1382.)

It is to Barduccio that we owe nearly all the details in the *Legenda* concerning the last months of Catherine's life, when Fra Raimondo was absent from her. "I trusted what he told me," says the good man, "because I knew the beauty of his soul." Fra Raimondo tells us, too, that Catherine loved this new disciple with special tenderness, "and this, I doubt not, on account of his angelical purity."

Early in May Florence sent eight ambassadors to congratulate Pope Urban VI on his election, and certain of these were delegates for peace. This measure had been ceaselessly urged by Catherine who saw in it the chief hope of saving Florence. It was about this time that she wrote to Cardinal Pedro de Luna, who had been represented to her by Raimondo as the principal factor in Urban's election, bewailing the misery of Florence, which no longer observed the Interdict, and therefore lay under a double condemnation. But this wickedness, at least, her influence was able to end. "The sun will soon rise," she writes to Alessia in Siena, "for the dawn is beginning to break. Nay, it has already broken, for the darkness of

mortal sin which enshrouded these people, who were hearing and reciting the Offices of the Church, is already fast disappearing since the Interdict is now observed in spite of those who would disregard it. Thanks, thanks be given to our Sweet Saviour, Who has not despised the humble prayers, the tears, and the ardent desires of His servants. Since not only has He not despised them, but has heard their cry, you must pray, and obtain many prayers that the Divine Goodness may send us peace to the glory of God, that all this trouble may cease, so that we may find ourselves together once more, to talk of the wonderful works of God . . . Get special prayers in the monasteries, and tell our Prioress to bid all her daughters to pray for peace, so that God may have mercy upon us, and that I may not return until it is settled. Ask her to pray for me, her miserable daughter, that God may give me grace to love Him, to declare the Truth always, and to die for it."

The Prioress here referred to was, of course, the Directress of the Mantellate. Only two of the Sisters, Lisa, and one of whom we shall presently hear more, Giovanna da Capo, had accompanied Catherine to Florence, a city full of memories to gentle-hearted Lisa. It does not appear that Benincasa was still here in 1378. Catherine and her friends were lodged in Soderini's house near the Ponte alla Carraia, the nearest bridge to Santa Maria Novella, a little higher up the Arno than the Ponte Santa Trinità; and besides Neri and Stefano, their only other companion was Fra Santi, the holy hermit who, in spite of his advancing age and frail health, followed Catherine in all her journeyings, and was with her to the end. "He found in his old age," says Fra Raimondo, "the precious pearl of the Gospel in Blessed Catherine. For her he quitted his peaceful cell and style of living, in order to labour not solely for himself but for the good of others. He declared that he found greater tranquillity and more profit to his soul in following Catherine and listening to her than he ever enjoyed in his solitude; above all, he made great progress in patience. He suffered much from a disease of the heart, and our Saint taught him to bear his continual suffering not only with resignation but with joy . . . and

a short time after she had left him he went to rejoin in the celestial city her whose disciple he had become on earth."

It is not proposed to follow in detail the intricate course of party politics in Florence during the spring and early summer of 1378. In all parties were to be found "honest men who strove for peace." But a great Guelf plot, to seize the whole power of the State, which was discovered on June 18th, led to furious rioting all over the city; prisons were broken open, monasteries attacked; a number of houses belonging to Guelfs—among them those of Piero Canigiani and his son Ristoro—were sacked and burnt, and Catherine's own life was in peril. For a few moments it seemed as if her greatest wish was to be accomplished, and she was to gain the crown of martyrdom by shedding her blood for the Church and for Peace.

Fra Raimondo's account of this, and of the troubles which led to it, cannot be improved upon. The reforms so earnestly pressed by Catherine had caused great opposition, especially among the Eight of War. The Guelfs deprived one of these of his charge, and succeeded in doing the same to a few other citizens. Private revenge was unfortunately gratified under the plea of public necessity. Personal enemies were exiled under false charges. "The number of the banished became so considerable that the whole city murmured; men became irritated against Catherine who, however, had not in any way been concerned in these proceedings. She even complained of them bitterly, saying, and causing it to be said, everywhere, that it was very ill to exile so many citizens, and that they ought not, under pretext of procuring peace, thus satisfy their personal and individual hatred." He goes on to describe how the Eight of War collected troops and incited the populace against the Guelfs, setting the whole city in revolution, burning their enemies' houses, and slaying a great number of them."

Many innocent persons suffered, and almost all those who desired peace were obliged to flee the city. "Catherine, who had come to labour for peace . . . was consequently in great peril. The leaders pointed her out to the people and everywhere the cry was heard: 'Take

that wicked woman alive ; burn her, cut her in pieces' . . . but Catherine, confident of her innocence, suffered the whole joyfully for the sake of the Holy Catholic Church, and remained calm and cheerful, encouraging her companions." Then, as the cries drew nearer, as the excited mob rushed down Lung' Arno towards Soderini's house, she withdrew with her friends " into a place where there was a garden, and gave herself to prayer . . . The messengers of Satan came in also with tumult, armed with swords and clubs, crying out : ' Where is that cursèd woman ? ' Catherine heard them, preparing herself for martyrdom as for a celestial banquet. She went up to him who, armed with a sword, was shouting louder than any : ' Where is Catherine ? ' and kneeling before him said, joyously : ' I am Catherine, do whatever God suffers you to do to me, but in His Name I command you not to touch any of my friends.' On hearing this the man who threatened her seemed to tremble at her presence. He bade her go away, but she, all eager for martyrdom, said : ' Here I am ; whither would ye have me go ? I am ready to suffer for God and His Church as I have always longed to do . . . if you are charged to kill me, then slay me fearlessly ; I will make no effort to escape, but do not harm my companions.' "

The rioters, completely quelled, left the garden in a body, while Catherine bewailed to her friends that for her sins her Divine Bridegroom had not willed to bestow upon her the red rose of martyrdom. But all danger was not over. It was not considered safe for her to remain in Soderini's house. Raimondo, indeed, says that her hosts were afraid and sent her away, for so great was the terror that no one dared receive her into his dwelling. She was advised to leave Florence, but she declared that she would never do this till peace was established, since this was the Will of God. Finally, in the humble house of Francesco Pippino, tailor, and Monna Agnese his wife—both old friends of the dyer's daughter, and her disciples and correspondents since her first visit to Florence—Catherine and her friends found safety and shelter.

Hence, probably the same night (June 22nd, 1378), she wrote a stirring letter to Fra Raimondo—for to him, in

any crisis, Catherine poured out her heart—detailing the events of the day. “Let us glory in our sufferings,” she cries, “without seeking our own glory, but the glory of God and the salvation of souls, like the martyrs who were ready to suffer torments and death for the Truth Eternal. It is thus they founded the walls of Holy Church—in their blood shed for love of the Blood. O Sweet Blood ! which can raise the dead ! O Blood ! dispersing the darkness in the blinded souls of reasonable men, and restoring them to light ! O Sweet Blood ! uniting those that are separated, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, satisfying the thirsty . . . O Sweet Blood ! who would not be inebriated by Thee ? None but the selfish, who perceive not Thy fragrance . . . I announce to you, my dear sweet Father, that to-day I desire to begin a new life, so that henceforth my sins shall never again deprive me of the joy of dying for Jesus Crucified ; for clearly do I see that it is my own fault if that privilege be not already mine. My desire was greatly increased, and I was burning to suffer, all worthless as I was, for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, for the reformation and the welfare of Holy Church. My heart was breaking with love and desire to sacrifice my life. This desire was both sweet and bitter : sweet, because I was united to the Truth ; bitter, because my heart suffered in beholding this offence against God, and the cloud of demons which darkened the city, obscuring the minds of all that dwelt there, so that it seemed that God permitted it for justice and for vengeance ; thus . . . I dreaded the evil which was so nearly accomplished, and which would have prevented the conclusion of peace . . . But the desire which I had to give my life for the Truth and for the sweet Spouse of Christ was not granted. The Eternal Spouse of my soul deceived me, as Cristofano will tell you with his own lips¹ . . . My blood has not reconciled the father and the son ; my blood has cemented no stone in the mystical Body of Holy Church. It was as if the hands of the striker were tied.

¹ Cristofano di Gano Guidini, Catherine's old friend, the Sienese notary, who often acted as her secretary, had come to Florence a few weeks earlier to replace Stefano Maconi, whose parents had called him home. Hence Stefano was not present at the scene just described. Ser Cristofano was the bearer, and doubtless the writer of this letter to Fra Raimondo.

I said: 'Here I am, take me, and spare those who are with me,' and these words were like dagger-thrusts, piercing the hearts of the murderers." After describing her joy at the prospect of such a death, she concludes with a generous and passionate appeal to Raimondo to use his influence with Pope Urban in the matter of this tumult. "Beg the Christ on earth not to postpone the peace on account of what has happened. On the contrary, let him press it forward with greater zeal, so that he may occupy himself with the great designs he has for the honour of God and the reformation of Holy Church. This outbreak has changed nothing, and now the town is perfectly quiet. Pray him to hasten peace . . . tell him to have pity and compassion on these darkened souls; ask him to draw me soon out of this prison, for, until peace is made, I cannot leave this place, and I greatly wish to taste the blood of the martyrs, to visit His Holiness and meet you again to talk over all the marvellous things that God has wrought in these latter days."

Florence, however, was not so calm as Catherine had believed. It was thought wiser, in view of the general excitement, that she and her friends should spend a few days outside the city. "She departed," says Raimondo, "out of the city, though not out of the territory, and came with those she had cherished as her children in the Lord into a solitary place inhabited by hermits." This is believed to be Vallombrosa. Here dwelt that great spiritual director of the late fourteenth century, Giovanni dalle Celle, of whom Barduccio Canigiani had been the disciple, and who, like Barduccio, had been led to look upon St. Catherine as a teacher sent from God. The holy hermit called her his mother. Two of Catherine's letters to him exist, one of which evidently refers, though indirectly, to the disorders caused by the breach of observance of the Interdict in Florence. The fact of his friendship with the Saint, and Barduccio's affection for his former director, make it almost certain that the place of retreat sought by Catherine and her Little Company was the woods of beautiful Vallombrosa, whose purple snow-lit heights she had daily beheld from her lodging on Lung' Arno, over the rusty red roofs of crowded Ponte Vecchio.

It was not long, however, before they returned to Florence ; at first secretly, then openly, for Catherine hated concealment and knew not fear. It was about this time, early in July, that she wrote two letters to Urban VI. The first, written probably directly after the rising in which she had so nearly perished, is short, and contains little of special interest except a plea for Fra Bartolommeo Dominici, who had evidently offended Urban by too great freedom of speech. Fra Giovanni Tantucci had related the sad story to Catherine and she explains that the good Friar had only spoken as he did through a conscientious scruple. "The very thought of having annoyed your Holiness has caused him great sorrow, as well as myself. I pray you, for the love of Jesus Crucified, to punish me for the pain he caused you. I am ready to endure any penance, any punishment that your Holiness may inflict. My sins have surely caused him to fall into this fault ; it is only fitting I should bear the penalty. He earnestly desires to seek forgiveness in person, when your Holiness will receive him. Bear his faults in mind with patience." Thus writes the loving mother in defence of one of her dearest children, though, to say the truth, the fault was probably not in Fra Bartolommeo but in Urban himself. The letter closes with Catherine's thanks for the favour granted her by the Pontiff on the day of St. John the Baptist—probably a plenary indulgence for that Feast, which is to Florence what that of Il Redentore is to Venice, and that of the Assumption to Siena. This approximately fixes the date of the first letter.

The second letter is longer. "Most Holy Father," writes Catherine, after warning Urban, as she had so often warned Gregory XI, of the danger of applying ointment to a festering sore that rather needs cauterizing, "God has established you as Chief Pastor of His sheep ; He has chosen you to administer the Blood of Jesus Crucified, Whose Vicar you are, and He has chosen you at a time when the wickedness of the faithful is greater than it has ever been, both among the clergy and among all Christians. Thus it is most necessary that you should be strengthened in perfect charity with the precious jewel of justice, as I told you. Be not anxious as to what the world says ; care

not for the abuse of wretched sinners, but, like a true knight, a good shepherd, reform boldly, and with courage. Root out vice, plant virtue everywhere, and be ready to lay down your life if God so wills it."

The Saint goes on to beg the Pope "to renew entirely the garden of the Spouse" by creating a college of holy Cardinals; men who would aid him in his great work, and be no longer a cause of scandal. "Let them be firm as columns, to help, with God's Grace, to support the burden you are called upon to bear." This reformation of the Sacred College was the first step of that reformation which Catherine never ceased to urge. Had Urban, even now, followed her advice courageously, in spite of the terrible events which were evident and ominous, the situation would have been altered, if not saved. But if Catherine could not persuade him to this step, at least she had effected the purpose for which the Pope had sent her to Florence.

It was on Sunday, July 18th, 1378, that peace was proclaimed at last. The Pope's messenger brought the olive to Florence announcing that the Holy Father had indeed come to terms with the Florentine ambassadors in Rome; and the whole city went mad with joy. The peace, however, was not signed until ten days later. The indemnity demanded by Urban VI was about an eighth of that required by Pope Gregory XI. The Florentines were also to restore to the Church her property confiscated by them for the expenses of the war; and all civil laws passed against the Church were to be annulled. The Interdict was raised, and Florence was to receive a full pardon.

The day after the reception of the Peace news, Florence was again swept by a revolution—this time of the *Popolo Minuto*, who objected to the high-handed proceedings of the Signoria; and for a time succeeded in getting all power into their own hands. So, on August 1st, when news came that the peace had been signed at Tivoli, Florence, though supremely thankful, thought it wiser to abandon the public rejoicings which had once been planned.

Thus Catherine's work was done. She had been successful—for the sending of the ambassadors had been due chiefly to her influence; but so completely changed was

ever-changing Florence that many of those who had welcomed her arrival as well as those who had plotted to remove her, were exiled, and not a few were dead. In spite of her danger during the second revolution in July, she had remained in Florence, probably again at the house of Francesco Pippino. But the moment the news came of the signing of the Peace she left the Lily City, this time for ever. The second great achievement of her short life was completed and she longed to be back in Siena, from which she had been absent over five months.

Fra Raimondo tells us that when Catherine was preparing to depart, Giovanna da Capo was suffering from high fever and a badly swollen foot, which would have prevented her walking. Catherine would not leave her alone, and had recourse to prayer. While she was praying the sick woman fell asleep, and when she awoke not only had the fever left her but her foot was perfectly whole ; so that when the day of departure dawned she was able to set out with the others.

The very beautiful letter addressed by Catherine to the Gonfaloniere and Priors of the republic of Florence is one of the most touching she ever wrote.¹ In it she bids them farewell, counselling them who sought to reform their city to begin with themselves, for so only would their efforts be successful. Her intention, she says, was to visit them "and to rejoice with them at the holy peace" just declared ; for which peace she had so long and so hardly laboured. But the devil had sown so much evil in the hearts of the people that it was better to go quietly, "lest sin should be added to sin."

Thus Catherine left Florence, full of consolation that the peace had been granted ; full of grief at the hard hearts she left behind her, yet not without hope for the future of the State. For the evils she had just witnessed, compared to the terrible rumours of unspeakable disasters threatening the Church were, as she had herself told Fra Raimondo, "milk and honey."

¹ This letter is published for the first time by Mr. Edmund Gardner (*op. cit.*, pp. 250-1 ; and Appendix, Letter iv).

(3)

THE day that St. Catherine left Florence the storm, the mutterings of which had been heard in the distance for three months, broke at last. It was on August 2nd, 1378, that thirteen of the sixteen Cardinals who had elected Urban VI, published from Anagni the infamous decree which affirmed that Pope Urban had only been elected to please the Romans, and under fear of death on the part of the electors. It was the Declaration of War.

What, then, had happened, since at Easter all the electors had done homage to the new Pope, reassuring him as to the validity of his election, and promising him their honourable support? The events of May, June, and July point to one answer: The Cardinals had discovered they had been mistaken in the character of him whom they now addressed as "the former Archbishop of Bari"; and whom they were not afraid to call upon to abdicate as an apostate. Looking back across the centuries this seems clear as daylight, now that the dust of the conflict has settled among the ashes of the past; but at the time, when men's minds were failing them for fear in the darkness and gloom, it must have been almost impossible for any one of the political stakeholders to judge fairly of the actions of another; to say that any—at least of the minor figures in this terrible drama—were acting in bad faith. As to the two or three principally concerned, there can unfortunately be little doubt. Several points even then must have appeared beyond dispute. Though no one could deny that Urban's election was in the nature of a compromise; that one of the Sacred College would have been undoubtedly elected had the Cardinals been left undisturbed, unthreatened, with the usual time for deliberation; though it is quite evident that the Archbishop of Acerenza was elected (primarily because of his comparative unimportance) in fear, yet he had not been elected through fear. Between these two points a great gulf is fixed. There is no possible doubt that the French and Limousin Cardinals were beyond measure annoyed at being forced, *volentes volentes*, to elect an Italian. But

their annoyance was grounded on the fact that they wanted a French Pope for political reasons. Briefly they detested Rome and loved Avignon. Yet there was, on the other hand, no way in which a French Pope—even had he remained in Rome—could have served the Church better than one of another nationality ; while, considering the justifiable wrath of the Italians over the wicked excesses of many French Cardinals, such as du Puy in Perugia, there is every reason to believe that the political influence of a French Pope would, in 1378, have done more harm than good to the Church. But this, after all, is merely a side issue.

Again, it may be said that had not Urban alienated by his arrogance and insolence even his most faithful supporters, everything would have been different. It was because the Cardinals found his behaviour unbearable, his language abusive, hard, and bitter, that they began to wonder, first, if they had not made a mistake ; and next, if that mistake was irreparable. Their change of attitude was gradual. They had, for the want of a better choice, elected the wrong man, as far as their policy and personal feelings were concerned. The more they began to dislike Urban the more insistent became the question : Why should we have this man to reign over us ? The Archbishop of Acerenza had been irreproachable ; Urban VI was a completely changed man. The fact was that the new Pope was an excellent subordinate, as he had proved during his vice-chancellorship at Avignon ; adequate to follow, and indeed to advise and strengthen ; of solid learning and long-proved prudence and political knowledge. The new Pope, however, full of excellent intentions, and of blameless life, would have been called, as an ordinary individual, a stupid, well-meaning man, of narrow outlook, violent temper and entire want of adaptive capacity. Arguing carefully from all the given data we may not unfairly conclude that if Urban, during the first three months of his pontificate had been clever enough to placate the embittered minds and soothe the ruffled feelings of his electors—knowing as he did the conditions of his election—had he been intuitive, benignant, genial, ready to overlook the past and to make discretion the main ingredient in his present policy of reform—

had he, in short, refrained from wounding public feeling, the Great Schism might—probably would—never have taken place.

All this, obviously, has no bearing on the fact of the validity of Urban's election. Many Popes have been unpopular; an Alexander VI has sat upon the throne of St. Peter as well as a St. Celestine and a St. Pius, and all were equally the canonical successors of the Apostle. But these side issues do serve to explain what is otherwise almost unthinkable: that the Sacred College should twice elect a Pope; should do him homage, should encourage, enthrone, crown him, and then, before he had time to prove effectively what manner of ruler he might be, depart in a body to plot for the overthrow of him whom their two leaders had sworn rather to die than forsake. No merely political reasons, no French propaganda, not even the general corruption of the Church and the decay of noble ideals can serve to explain this away. And yet it happened, so that even to-day, since no Pope, no General Council has made an authoritative pronouncement on the subject, the question is still technically open: Who, in 1378, was the true successor of St. Peter?—Bartolommeo Prignano, Urban VI, or Robert of Geneva, Clement VII? Happily there is, thanks to the courageous action of Martin V, no longer a loophole for discussion as to the right succession. Happily, too, there is—if ever there was—no genuine doubt as to the validity of Urban's election. "To-day," says Pope Benedict XIV, "the darkness disappears, the legitimacy of Urban and his successors appears clear and evident in the light of day."¹ But at the time, so conflicting were the varying accounts, so clever the suppression of and the juggling with priceless documentary evidence, so innumerable the various issues raised to blind and confuse the minds of men, that the very Saints themselves are compelled to ask the question: Who is the true Pope?

Fifty years later this very question was to be put to the only woman except St. Bridget raised to the altars of the Church whose life may in any degree be compared with that of St. Catherine. "Who is the true Pope?" one of

¹ *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*, L. I., ch. ix, no. x.

her judges asked of Blessed Jeanne d'Arc, on trial for her life ; and quick as thought came the answering question : " Is there more than one ? " St. Catherine herself, fully informed as she had been from the beginning by her learned Roman friends as to every detail of the election and its results, was never for a single instant in doubt. The few remaining months of her short life were to be spent in fighting on the side of Urban, and he, hard and obdurate as he proved in many respects, at least knew how to value her fearless loyalty.

The question of the validity of Urban's election is not a theological one. It is purely historical. We have followed the course of that election, and have seen how, during the early weeks of May, 1378, the Catholic Sovereigns of Europe, as well as the six Cardinals at Avignon, were duly notified that the Archbishop of Acerenza had been elected Pope. We have also seen how the French and Limousin Cardinals had secretly warned those notified that there was a doubt as to the election.

Urban VI was badly served by his messengers and ambassadors. Unused to rule, here lay his initial mistake. Entirely honest himself, he trusted too much to the honour of his opponents. His envoys left too late, and were chosen from among the wrong men. The prelate sent as ambassador to Charles V, suborned by the French Cardinals and the Court Chamberlain, after acquitting himself carefully of his mission, openly declared his doubts as to the legitimacy of Urban's election. " He became the centre of all unfriendly reports ; he related with a thousand exaggerated details the violence of the Romans upon the Sacred College before and during the election." Later on when Urban sent a second embassy, of whose number, at Catherine's prayer, Fra Raimondo was one, it was too late. In Spain and Portugal it was the same. Urban seemed fated to be betrayed by the very men he had chosen to defend his cause. " Their interests were easily brought into line with their passion to overthrow Prignano." The man who had been an example to all at Avignon by his upright and self-restrained life was now, according to the Cardinals, the common enemy. Indeed,

Urban had already shown himself obstinate, even inflexible; hasty and fantastic in his projects of reform; utterly tactless; harsh to suppliants whether worthy or unworthy. For this harshness we shall presently find him rebuked by St. Catherine. The reforms he exacted of the Cardinals were so drastic, so hasty, as to be practically impossible. His violent language made him hated as well as feared. He scolded the Sacred College furiously, calling Cardinal Orsini "lunatic," and Robert of Geneva "ribald." In a few weeks the aged Cardinal Tebaldeschi, an honourable Roman noble of the old school, was his only adherent. But even so, the Pope seems to have had no glimmering of the appalling danger which threatened Christendom in his person.

The citadel of Sant' Angelo had never opened to Urban. This fortress became a hostile centre, and he was therefore unable to occupy the Vatican. It was known that the Pope intended to create a number of Italian Cardinals to counteract the influence of the large majority of Frenchmen in the Sacred College; and Robert of Geneva and the Cardinal-Bishop of Amiens, Robert de la Grange, arranged with de Cros, the commandant, to prevent the Pope from entering Sant' Angelo. The Cardinal of Amiens was indeed a formidable opponent. He was the familiar of Charles V, and had not been present at Urban's election. Gifted, laden with honours and riches, he was one of those who resented most strongly the way in which the election had been brought about; and violent and unseemly quarrelling took place when the two, Cardinal and Pope, came face to face. Urban did not hesitate to call the Cardinal of Amiens a liar and de la Grange made the historic retort: "Archbishop of Bari, thou liest!"

In May the thirteen Cardinals, with de la Grange in the place of Tebaldeschi, retired to Anagni, and there the plot was outlined. Meanwhile, acting on instructions from the Cardinals of Geneva and Amiens, Pierre de Cros, himself a Cardinal's brother, arranged with Bernadon de la Salle, an old robber-chief of the Hawkwood type, who was at the head of two hundred Gascon and Navarrese free-lances, to protect the dissident Cardinals. This step

did at last arouse Urban's suspicions. In June he sent the three Italian Cardinals to Anagni, to plead with their brethren. They suggested, in Urban's name, that a General Council should be called. If this was not approved the Pope agreed to submit the choice to six deputies. But the dissident Cardinals refused everything. They would not even re-elect Urban—and here is plain proof that they were consulting their political interests rather than the cause of the Church; for such a re-election would have finally and validly settled the whole matter for ever. Such a course as theirs had but one issue, and none knew better than Robert of Geneva that they were about to plunge the whole of Christendom into the abyss of Schism.

On this occasion, however, they sent reassuring messages to Urban; but the very same evening they held a meeting, at which it was decided that his election was invalid. To this they invited the three Italian Cardinals, but the invitation was refused. Matters went from bad to worse during the next few weeks, as the dissident Cardinals began to feel their position growing stronger, politically; and to realize that their plot had the sympathy at least of France. Meanwhile Urban had concluded peace with Florence, and five days later, following the abusive letter to which reference has been made, appeared the final declaration of the Cardinals that his election was invalid. After this, events followed thick and fast.

On August 9th, the Cardinals at Anagni published an Encyclical to all the faithful recapitulating the story of the election, and the subsequent events; and putting themselves under the protection of Gaetano, Count of Fondi, near Naples, a nobleman who had been "grossly insulted" by the Pope. Three weeks later the Cardinals left Anagni for Fondi in a body. Here they would be further from Rome and nearer the protection of Giovanna, Queen of Naples, who had at first been entirely loyal to Urban VI, but who had become disaffected since the Pontiff had also "grossly insulted" her fifth husband. On September 7th Cardinal Tebaldeschi died, affirming with his last breath the validity of Urban's election. The Pope was now quite deserted.

On September 15th the three Italian Cardinals joined their colleagues at Fondi. No persuasions had been spared by the traitors to secure the adherence of these prelates, each of whom, it is credibly reported, had been secretly promised that at the now inevitable election, he should be chosen as Pope. Robert of Geneva was well aware that the matter could not be delayed, for it was now known that Urban was about to create twenty-nine new Cardinals. Three days later a letter arrived at Fondi from King Charles V, encouraging the dissidents, urging the election of a French Pope and promising men and money to support such an election. On September 20th, 1378, Robert, Cardinal of Geneva, was elected Pope with only one dissenting voice, though the three Italian Cardinals, now aware of the deception practised on them, declined to vote. The antipope took the name of Clement VII.¹ All was now over. The Great Schism had begun.

The antipope was related to the King of France, and to many noble French families. Tall and handsome, of attractive manners and imposing appearance, his career as an ecclesiastic had attracted no special notice. He had been Bishop of Therouanne for seven years, and had afterwards held the see of Cambrai, without any complaint from his diocesans. But the year before he had stood by at Cesena while the mercenaries of Gregory V cut down four thousand helpless victims in cold blood, while nearly fifteen thousand others were driven out to perish of want and exposure. Italy would never forget this, nor forgive the "Butcher of Cesena."

Though the following letter was written a few months later it may be fittingly quoted in this connection. In it St. Catherine addresses the three Italian Cardinals whom shame retained in the anti-papal party, though they had taken no active part in the election. With Corsini and Orsini, whom the Saint knew personally, she had already been in correspondence.

"Dearest Brothers and Fathers in Christ, Sweet Jesus, I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus

¹ This title was afterwards borne by a true Pope, Giuliano de' Medici, nephew and successor of Pope Leo X. He was the Pope Clement VII who excommunicated Henry VIII, and during whose reign the Emperor sacked Rome.

Christ, write to you in His Precious Blood with the desire of seeing you return to the true and perfect light, escaping from the blindness and darkness into which you have fallen. Then, and not otherwise will you be my Fathers. If I now call you Fathers it is on condition that you abandon death and return to life. For now you have lost the life of grace ; you are members separated from the Head from whom you drew life when you were united by faith and perfect obedience to Pope Urban VI." After dwelling on the swift passage of all earthly dignities and grandeurs, and pointing out that had they realized the true aim of their lives they would have acted very differently, Catherine continues : " You have been chosen as flowers in the garden of the Church, so that the sweet perfume of your virtues may be perceived by all men ; you have been placed as columns to sustain the throne of Peter and the Vicar of Christ on earth ; you have been placed like a light on a candlestick to enlighten the faithful and to spread the faith. Have you fulfilled the purpose for which God created you ? Certainly not. Self-love and pride have prevented you from doing your duty . . . Where is your gratitude to the Spouse of Christ which has nourished you at Her own bosom ? I see nothing but ingratitude, and this has dried up all devotion within you.

" What shows me plainly that you are both ungrateful and mercenary ? The persecution which you and others are raising against this Holy Spouse at the moment when you should be Her shield against the attacks of heresy. You know the truth ; you know that Pope Urban VI is the true Pope, the Sovereign Pontiff, regularly and duly elected, not by fear, but by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost far more than by your votes. Yourselves have announced this truth to us. And now, like base and cowardly knights you turn your backs on him ; your own shadows make you afraid ; you have deserted the truth which gave you strength and have attached yourselves to a lie which can only weaken soul and body by depriving you of grace, both spiritual and temporal. And what is the cause ? The venom of self-interest, which has poisoned the world . . . You were angels on earth whose duty it was to resist the evil spirits of hell, and to fulfil the

office of angels in heaven, by leading back the strayed sheep to the Obedience of Holy Church. You have taken the work of devils upon you, and the worst of it is that you want to lead us into it with you, withdrawing us from the Obedience of the Christ on earth to attach us to the Obedience of the anti-Christ, who is a member of the devil, as you also are as long as you continue in this heresy. And this blindness of yours is not the result of ignorance ; no one has misrepresented these things to you ; you know the truth perfectly well ; you have already announced it to us and do not need us to teach it to you.

“ Alas, what madness this is of yours to tell us the truth and to follow a lie yourselves ! You are trying to corrupt the truth now by saying you elected Pope Urban through fear. It is not true. In saying this I speak to you without respect of your persons, for you yourselves have been wanting in reverence to your Head. It is perfectly clear to anyone who examines the question that the person you elected through fear is Monsignore di San Pietro (Cardinal Tebaldeschi). You will perhaps say : ‘ Why cannot you take our word for it ? We know the truth better than you, since we made the election.’ I will answer : You so often prevaricate that I have no right to believe you when you tell me that Pope Urban VI is not the true Pope. If I examine your lives, to begin with, I do not find them so exemplary and holy that they are a guarantee of your truth and conscientiousness. What makes me certain that your lives are not holy is the fact that they are infected with the poison of heresy.

“ If I examine the election which has been made it is clear from your own witness that it was canonical, and not made through fear . . . What proves that the election of Monsignore di Bari, to-day Pope Urban VI, was well and truly made ? The proofs are the solemnities of his coronation, the homage you rendered him, the favours you asked of him. You made use of him in a hundred ways, and you cannot deny it without lying. O fools, worthy of a thousand deaths, in your blindness you do not see your folly ; you have fallen into such hopeless confusion that you have proclaimed yourselves openly liars and idolaters. If what you now say is true, which it is not,

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"You may say: 'We took no part in the election.' I do not know if I can believe that—for I cannot believe that otherwise you would have been able to stay there, had the departing cost you your lives . . . What shall I say more? I will say that he who is not for the truth is against it, and he who is not for the Christ on earth, Pope Urban VI, is against him. I accuse you of having participated in this crime, and I tell you you have elected a member of the devil. Had he been a member of Christ he would have died rather than consent to such an iniquity. For well does he know the truth, and he can make no excuses as to ignorance. You are guilty, and have made yourselves accomplices of that devil in recognizing him as Pope against the truth, and offering him a homage to which he had no right."

The rest of this long letter is taken up with passionate pleading that the schismatical Cardinals will return to the True Fold. "I would rather have spoken than written to you," cries Catherine, "but God's will be done! You deserve punishment rather than my words."

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besides holy men of blameless life too numerous to name. St. Colette, the reformer of the Poor Clares, was under the Clementine Obedience, as was St. Vincent Ferrer, who was also long attached to Pedro de Luna, the future antipope, Benedict XIII. By the mercy of God he recognized his mistake before it was too late, and with the humility born of true saintliness, in 1416 he solemnly retracted his error from the pulpit. In the Urbanist Obedience we find St. Catherine of Siena and St. Catherine of Sweden, as well as St. Peter of Alcantara. To men's eyes it seemed as though the Seamless Robe were indeed rent in twain for ever. The religious doubts, the doctrinal incertitudes of the Great Schism, have been finally dissipated ; but its effects, of which Gallicanism was the chief, were felt for more than four centuries. There had been antipopes who had broken the Unity of the Church—conscienceless intruders introduced by the caprice of a monarch, or by a popular revolution. But their action left little trace ; they were mere puppets, no sooner past than forgotten. The Schism of 1378 was a very different matter. "Ought not the Cardinals to have shed their blood rather than make a false election ?" asks St. Vincent Ferrer, and solemnly answers the question with the memorable words : "I cannot presume to judge." No human establishment could have endured a shock so awful ; but the Throne of Peter is founded upon a Rock.

There begynneth the booke of dyuine doctryne. That is to
saye of goddes techynge. Gyuen by the persone of god the fa-
der / to the intellection of y glourous byrgyn seynt Kather-
ryn of Seene / of the ordre of seynt Dompnycke. Whiche was
wrytē as she endyted i her moder tongue / Whā she was in cō
replacō / & rapt of spyrte / she hereynge actualy. And i y same
tyme / she tolde befoze many what our lord god spake i her.





And here foloweth þy fyrst
chapytre of this boke. Which
is how þy soule of this mayde
was oned to god & how þy she
made. iiii. petcyons to oure
lorde in that tyme of conten-
placyon / and of the answer
of god / and of moche other do

ctryne / as it is specyfyed in þy
kalender before. **C**apit.



A Soule that is rested
vp with heuenly and
ghostly desyres / & as
ferypōs to þy worlþypp
of god / & to the helthe
of mannes soule / and with a greate
a. l.



CHAPTER VI

THE HIDDEN THINGS OF GOD

(1378—1379)

(1)

“**A**S soon as Pope Urban VI had concluded peace with the Florentines, and the treaty was signed,” says Fra Raimondo, “Catherine returned to her home, and occupied herself actively with the composition of a book, which she dictated under the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost. She had requested her secretaries to be present during her ecstasies, and commit carefully to writing whatever she might dictate. This they accomplished with fidelity, thus collecting a whole volume of great and useful truths. She dictated this work while her soul was detached from her senses ; her body remaining absolutely insensible. God thus deigned to prove to us that this is no work of man’s composition, but that it emanated from the Holy Ghost Himself.” Fra Bartolommeo confirms this statement. “The whole world, it may be said, has recognized that Catherine’s science was infused into her soul by God Himself ; and the proof lies in her letters and discourses, but especially in the book which she dictated while unconscious in ecstasy.” This the good Friar affirmed fifty years before the Bull of Pope Pius II declared St. Catherine’s doctrine to have been “infused, not acquired.” In another place Raimondo remarks that as Catherine’s life drew to a close our Lord “manifested by various prodigies how proportionate the glory with which He would recompense His Spouse in Heaven was to the treasures with which His Grace had favoured her on earth. She invoked the blessed moment which was to unite her to Jesus Christ, when she would contemplate face to face in the Land of Life that Truth which she had seen reflected as in a glass, dimly, during her earthly pilgrimage.

The desire for this union increased in her heart in proportion as supernatural light beamed more clearly upon her understanding. Two years before her death, the Eternal Truth enlightened her soul so mightily . . . that she requested her secretaries to hear, and to commit to writing what she uttered during her ecstasies. Thus in a short space of time (*brevi tempore*) a book was composed containing a Dialogue between the Soul and God."

During August and September, 1378, Catherine had remained quietly at Siena, occupied with her extensive correspondence, and with her usual works of mercy. Her heart burnt within her at the sight of the abyss into which the dissident Cardinals were remorselessly dragging the Spouse of Christ; and without fear or favour she used both tongue and pen to the utmost of her power to avert the catastrophe she had already foretold. Shortly before October 4th she received, in answer to her own, the letters from Urban VI and from Fra Raimondo, to which reference has already been made, and wrote a long reply to the latter.¹ This reply is the letter which has been wrongly attributed to 1377. From it, and from the date written upon the original MS., which indicates October 13th as the day on which the Dialogue was completed, we are enabled to fix with some degree of certainty the actual length of time spent upon this great work—a time almost incredibly short.

"Qui finisce el libro fatto e composto per la Venerandissima Virgine, Caterina da Siena, dell' abito di Santo Domenico, sotto gli anni Domini 1378, del mese d'Ottobre. Amen."

"Here ends the book, made and composed by the most venerable Virgin Catherine of Siena, of the habit of St. Dominic, in the year of the Lord 1378, in the month of October." This sentence, placed by the scribe at the close of Catherine's book, seems to indicate plainly that the work was not only completed—as Gigli considers—but entirely composed during October, 1378. If the marginal date "October 13" fixes the day on which it was finished, when was it begun? St. Catherine's own letter to Raimondo informs us. After speaking of the bitterness of soul she had felt on the Feast of St. Francis (October 4th), on

¹ See Chapter IV (3), pp. 155, 156.

hearing of the awful blow which had fallen upon the Church; and of the consolation she had received through the letters of the "*Dolce Babbo mio*" and her confessor, she continues, speaking of herself in the third person: "Immediately, by the Power of Divine Grace, she felt an increased desire and a supernatural joy. Thus she waited in the morning to hear Mass. It was the Day of Mary, and when the hour of Mass had arrived she took her place to hear it, with a true knowledge of herself, and full of confusion at her own imperfection before Almighty God. She was withdrawn from herself by the force of her desire, and fixing the eye of her intelligence upon the Eternal Truth she addressed to Him four requests." The rest of the letter is a summary of the Dialogue itself, explaining the four requests and their answers. We may also note that in the Dialogue St. Catherine mentions that she has just received a letter from "the father of her soul" under exactly similar circumstances.

In 1378, October 4th fell on Monday. The following Saturday, "the Day of Mary," would be October 9th. On that day, according to St. Catherine, the first of this series of ecstasies took place, after Holy Communion. On these hypotheses the Dialogue was thus written on and between October 9th and 13th. "*Brevi tempore*," says Raimondo, supported by Caffarini. "This feat may appear extraordinary, but the work itself is a miracle, and cannot be measured by any human standards . . . We know that the Saint dictated only when in ecstasy, at the times when she conversed with her Spouse. It is important to determine the frequency and the duration of these ecstasies in order to judge if the composition of such a work was possible during five days. Dom Stefano bears witness that her soul was ravished to God daily, and many times a day."¹ Fra Bartolommeo confirms Stefano's statement. Fra Raimondo says of her letters: "She dictated them rapidly, with no break in her train of thought, however small. It was as if she was reading aloud from an open

¹ Hurtaud, *op. cit.*, p. xlix, *q.v.* The above argument is founded on that of the learned French Dominican, in the Preface to his fine translation of the Dialogue—the latest and most critical work upon the subject. The whole question should be studied in Père Hurtaud's own words.

book." "I have seen her many times dictate two different letters to two separate persons on divers subjects to two secretaries at once. Neither secretary had to pause for an instant in his task, and each was able to set down exactly the matter which concerned himself. As this greatly astonished me, several who had known Catherine before I did, and who had been present on many of these occasions, told me that sometimes she dictated to three or four secretaries at the same time, ever with the same swiftness of speech and certainty of memory." Francesco Malavolti,



in his valuable deposition, declares that the Saint was in the habit of dictating to three secretaries at once, of whom he was frequently one.

There is no reason to believe—more especially as a large number of her letters was dictated in ecstasy—that the dictation of the Dialogue was done less speedily, though only one secretary at a time was employed upon this work. "The Saint could easily have dictated thirty pages an hour, following the method described by her biographers; which [taking into consideration the length of the Dialogue] would mean that she was daily four or five hours in ecstasy while the book was being written. What were

four or five hours of dictation to Catherine, during a period of five days? It would be almost a rest to her, considering her usual habits and occupations . . . Rather would she deprive herself of sleep and food than be silent in presence of a soul whom she longed to bring to the knowledge and love of the Saviour. 'We put her to the test one day,' says Stefano Maconi. 'That day she neither ate nor slept, and never ceased speaking.' " Thus, while we may confidently accept October 9th as the date of the beginning of the Dialogue, we may also have little doubt in considering the marginal date, October 13th, to be that on which the Dialogue was completed.

The greater part of the book, including the end, was written by Stefano Maconi; the remainder being divided between Neri di Landoccio and Barduccio Canigiani. "*Prega per lo tuo inutile fratello peccatore*"—"pray for thy useless little brother, the sinner"—the formula appended by Stefano to the letters he wrote for Catherine, appears at the end of the Dialogue.

There has been much discussion as to the title of the work. Catherine always called it: "the book," or "my book." Fra Raimondo refers to it as a Dialogue between God and a Soul. Cristoforo di Gano says that the book has *since* been entitled "The Book of Divine Doctrine"; and later copies (*circa* 1398) were inscribed "The Book of Divine Providence." This last title has been adopted by Gigli, in his famous collection of St. Catherine's works. But the latest researches of Dominican critics prove that the most suitable and comprehensive name for the Dialogue of St. Catherine is "The Book of Mercy." An appeal for Mercy, the promise of Mercy, is indeed the theme of the entire work. But for sheer beauty no title can compare with that of an abbreviated translation in English, made by Don James, the confessor and chaplain of the Brigittine nuns of Syon, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1519.¹ He calls his work *The Orcharde of Syon*, and we cannot refrain from quoting part of the delightful prologue in which the good priest explains to his "relygyous mother and devout

¹ Wynkyn de Worde used Caxton's device at the end of both books, but neither this, nor the translation by Don James of the *Legenda*: "The lyf of Saint Katherin of Senis the blessid virgin," were printed by Caxton, who died in 1491 or 1492. These books should be seen, in the British Museum.

sisters" that the book has been translated for their "ghostly recreacyon."

"With helpe of your praye[r]s; (compelled by charyte), for ghostly affeccyon [I] purpose to wryte to you after my symple felynge (feeling) the revelacions of oure lorde to hys chosen mayde, Kathryne of Sene. This boke of revelacyons (as for your ghostly comforte) to you I call it a fructyferous orcharde . . . This orcharde, by goddes grace, my wyll is to devyde in to seven partes, and eche parte in to fyve chapyters, as ye may see and rede in the kalender folowynge. In this orcharde when ye wyll (wish to) be comforted ye may walke, and se bothe fruytes and herbes, and all be y^t (although) some fruytes or herbes seme to some sharpe, harde, or bytter, yet to purgynge of y^e soul they be ful spedefull and profytable, when they be dyscretely taken and receyved by counseyle. Therfor, relygyous sustren (sisters), in this ghostly orcharde at reasonable tyme ordeyned, I wyll that you dysporte you, and walke about where you wyll with your mynde and reason, in what alaye (alley) you lyke . . . You may chose of xxxv aleys in whiche you wyll walke, (that is to saye) of xxxv chapyters, one tyme in one, another tyme in another, but fyrste my counsaile is clerely to assaye and serche the hole orcharde, and taste of suche fruyte and herbes reasonable after your affeccyon, and what you lyketh best. Afterwarde chewe it well, and ete therof for helthe of your soule. And now sustren I cease of this prologue, and in the maner of [a] kalender here I wyll shewe unto you the ordynaunce of this orcharde. In tyme comynge, by goddes grace, as it pleaseth hym of his mercy to graunte me bodyly hele (health) and tyme of lyfe, to plante it and set it with such fruytes and herbes as oure lorde shewed to the foresayde mayde in her contemplacyon, when her body was ravysshed fro' all bodyly felynge, as wytnesseth her clerkes and all her dyscyples."

Such a title, such a prologue as this would have been after Catherine's own heart. Space forbids us to quote the "kalender"—a clear and beautiful summary of the whole Dialogue, but the charm of this old English work, with its curious illustrations—of which we reproduce the frontispiece—cannot be imagined from a single quotation.

It is interesting to note that St. Catherine's fame, not only as a wonder-working Saint but as a great mystical writer, had spread to northern lands not much more than a century after her death. Three of the early printed books of France, England and Germany are translations into the vernacular of the *Legenda*; and in English we have also the *Orcharde of Syon*. The "seven partes" and "fyve chapytters" of Don James are, however, quite arbitrary divisions. The original MS. has none of any kind; as if St. Catherine had dictated the work without any break. The dividing-up of the text into chapters was done, for convenience, a little later; and was the first attempt to organize the whole revelation into a series of connected treatises. The Dialogue has thus been variously divided by different copyists, into four, six, and seven portions; but the latest and most comprehensive plan is the simplest. The French critic already quoted separates the work into two parts: the Prelude, which contains the four requests for Mercy—

1. Mercy for Catherine.
2. Mercy for the Whole World.
3. Mercy for Holy Church.
4. What is the Providence of Mercy?

And the main body of the book, which contains the answers—

1. The Gift of Discretion.
2. The Gift of the Incarnate Word. The Gift of Conformity to Christ. The Gift of Tears.
3. The Reform of the Pastors.
4. The Explanation of the Providence of Mercy in a particular case, and generally; and the explanation of Obedience, and of a special Providence for the Obedient.¹

The Dialogue, which is written in the purest and most idiomatic Tuscan, is one of the most precious treasures of mediæval mysticism that the Church possesses. Apart from that other treasure of Catherine's letters, this book alone would place her in the front rank of writers of the *Quattrocento*, where she has been counted worthy to take her place beside Petrarch himself. But so much has been

¹ Hurtaud, *op. cit.*, p. lxxvii.

written about the Dialogue from a literary point of view that we do no more than mention the fact here. We are rather concerned with the truths it contains than with the style in which those truths are expressed ; with the manner of its composition rather than with the language in which it was written.

The Dialogue was dictated by St. Catherine in ecstasy, in that supernatural state described by the Eternal Word in the book itself. "The memory is filled with Me alone ; the intelligence has ears only for My Truth ; the will, which follows the intelligence, is wholly transmuted into Love for the Object contemplated with the eye of the spirit. All the powers of the soul being thus united and assembled and plunged into the abyss of My Being, the body loses all sensation." St. Teresa of Avila, two centuries later, was to write of the same phenomenon : "The eyes close involuntarily, and if one keeps them open by an effort of will it is scarcely possible to distinguish anything. . . . One hears, without understanding. Thus the senses are useless to the soul ; rather do they become a hindrance to its faculties, and harm rather than serve it . . . It is impossible to explain this state more clearly. To understand, however little, the sense of these words, one must have experienced it."

But, if "the tongue in speaking, speaks not," how, it may be asked, was the *Ecstatica* enabled to dictate audibly to her secretaries ? Catherine explains this in the Dialogue. At the close of the description of the supernatural state already quoted, the Eternal Father adds these words : "Except as it chances sometimes when the heart is overflowing : when I permit the tongue to express what the soul cannot contain, for the Glory and Honour of My Name. With this exception, the tongue utters no sound." It will be remembered how Fra Raimondo had heard the Saint murmur again and again in ecstasy after Holy Communion : "*Vidi Arcana Dei.*" Nor was St. Catherine of Siena the only Saint to whom this mystic favour of speech during trance was granted. St. Catherine of Ricci possessed it too, and so did St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi. But neither had it in so great a measure as our Saint ; nor has either left us, as she did, a literary master-

piece which is at the same time a treasure-casket of the *Arcana Dei*.¹

St. Catherine was not an imaginative person, nor a visionary. Of her sound practical common sense no greater proof could be found than that contained in her own letters. In all her writings there is more argument than rhetoric. Yet they have the quality common to all mystical expressions of philosophy—they cannot be translated from the abstract to the concrete. Take, for example, the marvellous symbolism of the Bridge, which reaches from earth to heaven, and has three steps or degrees. For, since the celestial road has been broken by Adam's transgression, God the Father has made of His Son a Way for the ransomed to pass over. "The Majesty of the Divinity is united to the clay of your humanity," says the Eternal Father; "it was necessary that this should be, since the road was broken, to permit men to traverse the bitterness of this world, and to win to Life Eternal." The three steps were made, two of the wood of the Holy Cross; the third of the bitterness of soul which Incarnate God endured when His tormentors offered Him vinegar mingled with gall. Again, they are the Sacred Feet, the Heart, the Mouth. The Bridge is the Incarnate Word: yet, says the Eternal Father, "it is built of the stones of true and solid virtues placed upon the Body of My Sweet Son, so that no rain may delay those who would pass over." The metaphors are mixed; they are changed; the symbolism appears first in one light, then in another; changing like a rainbow as the soul implores, adores in transports of love; or as the Eternal Truth sets forth some ineffable mystery. Nowhere can the parallels be forced. They are like those

"perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon
Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
Distinguish form."

As if the material plane was ever at an obtuse angle with the mystical.

¹ The physical rigidity and immobility of St. Catherine during her ecstasies may be contrasted with the state of St. Francis of Assisi, who in trance was able to move, to walk, and even to ride on his *asinello*, while unconscious of all earthly things, and wholly rapt away in God.

God communicated Himself to Catherine in unspoken words. *Cor ad cor loquitur*. To attempt to translate this supernatural language into human words must necessarily lead to "confusion." The Divine Inspiration, devoid of all form and sensible quality, was as an impression upon her soul, like that of a seal on wax. "In mystical perception there must always be an active force to render the perception vital, such as an act of knowledge; and also a quality of passivity; since the Divine Truth must vivify the created soul." In other words, the soul of an *Ecstatica* is in a state of "possession" by the Supreme Truth in a manner wholly intellectual. If she wishes to manifest the state, however, she must perforce clothe it in words, giving it the form common to human thought. Before translating it to others she must translate it to herself. In the question of mystical writings theologians are obliged to distinguish between the moment when the soul acts entirely in dependence upon God, and that in which it acts by its own natural forces. If a saint reproduces her visions in ecstasy when the trance is over—even when the words have been spoken aloud under supernatural conditions—we have to make the same distinction. Had Catherine attempted to dictate the Dialogue when she had resumed her normal state the book would fall into the catalogue of ordinary spiritual works. Fortunately we do not need to prove this was not the case. The Dialogue is the most wonderful revelation of the relations between God and a human soul—incidentally of the fiery soul of St. Catherine—ever given to man. "To understand it, one must have experienced it"; to appreciate it, even approximately, the revelation must be read, studied, meditated upon. No mere description of this marvellous book will give any idea of its contents, scope, or hidden meaning.

To attempt, then, in the space at our disposal to summarize the various sections of the book of which we have already quoted the plan, would be tedious and unprofitable. But as we are considering the period of the Great Schism, it will be well to quote some part of St. Catherine's own description of the state of the Church in the *Quattrocento*. It occurs in the Response to the third request

(Mercy for the Church), in the section entitled: "The Reform of the Pastors" (cc. 110-134), and it may be noted that the word "Church" is here used in its most limited sense, to denote merely the Hierarchy and the Clergy; the rest of the faithful being described in the Dialogue as: "the Body of the Christian Religion." In reply to the Saint's appeal for Mercy, the Eternal Father details the iniquities of the Church, and the punishments deserved by the sinners; the treatise concluding with a wonderful promise of Mercy to the penitent.

"If my priests considered their own dignity they could no longer remain in the darkness of mortal sin; no longer could they soil their souls. Not only so . . . but gladly would they give their bodies to be burned, out of gratitude for the great Grace and Mercy they have received. For in this life they can attain to no higher dignity than that of the priesthood. They are my anointed. I call them my Christs. Through Me they have received power to give Me to all the faithful . . . This dignity is not shared even by angels . . . I have made angels of My priests, and their life on earth should be angelic. From every soul I require charity and purity . . . how much more from My ministers? . . . As they desire the chalice they use to offer the Holy Sacrifice to be pure and stainless, so I demand the purity and spotlessness of their heart, their soul, their spirit, and of their body also, which is the instrument of the soul . . . For if they are cruel to themselves by their own sins they are also cruel to the souls of their flock . . . I require My priests to be generous, not avaricious; I will not that they sell through greed the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which is thine . . . To you, the faithful, belongs the task of nourishing and providing for the bodies of those who dispense to you spiritual food . . . and I would have you know that you receive incomparably more than you give.

"Of the temporal things with which you provide them My ministers should make three divisions: the first for their personal needs; the second for the poor; the third for those things necessary for the worship of Holy Church." The Eternal Truth then explains how grievous is the sin of those who persecute and injure even the wicked clergy.

“Were they not priests you would respect them only as ordinary men. But because of their priesthood the faithful owe them the deepest respect . . . When you offend them you offend Me. This sin I have forbidden in these words : ‘ *Nolite tangere Christos Meos.* ’ ”

Then follows (c. 119), after the eulogy of such holy priests as St. Gregory, St. Augustine, and the great doctors of the Church, the terrible description of the sins of the faithless pastors. They are like those who apply soothing ointment to a wound which rather requires the cauterizing iron. Nevertheless, the same respect must always be felt for their priesthood. “Nothing must diminish it, however their virtue may be lessened . . . because they are ever the dispensers of the Sacraments . . . In spite of their impurity, their garments of holiness torn to rags by every vice . . . you must honour them, whatever their crimes . . . Your duty is to deplore and detest their faults, and to do your best to procure them, by means of charity and holy prayer, new and clean garments ; and to wash away their stains in your tears . . . What has led them astray ? Self-love, from which springs the tree of pride, whose offshoot is spiritual blindness . . . Deprived of all spiritual sense they have no other aim but worldly honour and glory. They are on the look-out for high office. Their only ambition is pomp ; their only desire the pampering of their bodies . . . Puffed-up with pride they are insatiable in devouring the riches and delights of the world. They are avid, greedy, avaricious as regards the poor ; and these sins, sprung from sensual self-love, have wholly alienated from them the desire to save souls . . . They no longer sustain their own souls with fervent prayers, with ardent desire of salvation in a holy and honourable life . . . Nor do they distribute among the poor the alms the Church bestows on them . . . but rather do they despoil others by simony. Yea ! for love of gold they sell the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Often they have arrived at such a pitch of wickedness that what I have freely given them to distribute they refuse to the needy, until they have . . . received bribes . . . All the ecclesiastical revenues are spent on the purchase of sumptuous garments, to show themselves splendidly clad,

like nobles and knights of the court. They have a great liking for fine horses, for ornaments of gold and silver to decorate their houses . . . Eating and drinking without restraint they speedily fall into impurity and debauchery.

“Woe, woe to their miserable lives! It is thus they spend with public sinners that which the Sweet Word, My Only-Begotten Son, gained at so great a price on the wood of the Most Holy Cross. Thus . . . do they devour souls ransomed by the Blood of Christ. Thus do they nourish their sons with the patrimony of the poor . . . Such as these are incarnate devils, since by their sins they have conformed themselves to the will of the devil . . . spreading the darkness of their own criminal lives over those other reasonable souls who are subject to them . . . Often they confuse and trouble the consciences which have let themselves be turned from the way of Grace . . . Dragging them into sin, they lead them by the way of lies, though such souls are without excuse, for no power can force them into mortal sin, neither of visible nor invisible demons . . . I had made them free . . . I had such regard for their liberty that I forbade, and still forbid, any temporal prince to constitute himself their judge. How have they repaid Me? . . . By crimes of all sorts, such as the tongue cannot describe, and which could not be told thee.

“Their place is at the Table of the Most Holy Cross . . . But their table is placed in taverns, and places of public amusement. There they are to be found, swearing and forswearing themselves, making an open show of their vice and misery. They are like madmen. Their sins have made them like animals. Their actions, gestures, words—all are sensual and evil, and they delight in them. They scarcely know any longer what the Office is; and if sometimes they recite it, it is with their lips only, while their heart is far from Me. Their behaviour is that of gallants and libertines . . . They have become temples of the devil; how can it be wondered at that they care no longer for My Temple? . . . Playing the part of the husband who adorns his wife with jewels, these incarnate devils decorate the diabolical accomplice of their injustice and shamelessness with the spoils of the Church . . . They cause her

to be present, holding her children by the hand, at the Office which they celebrate at My altar.

“O demons and worse than demons! If at least you were careful not to blazon forth your iniquities in the eyes of those souls of whom you have charge! You would still sin against Me by committing them in secret, and would lose your own souls, but at least you would not drag other souls down into ruin by the display of your crimes . . . Is this the purity I require of My priest, when he ascends to the altar? In the morning, a sinful soul in a corrupted body, he rises [in mortal sin], and goes out to celebrate Mass . . . Where are the nightly vigils, the holy solemnities of the Divine Office? Where is your assiduous and fervent prayer, teaching you to know yourself, and to find yourself unworthy of your high calling?”

Then the awful list of sins is continued in blackest detail. From the sight of the most terrible of all, with which the whole Church was infected, even the devils fled. It is plainly intimated that it was on account of this sin that the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague were allowed to devastate Europe. “With this leprosy all are soiled: great and small, young and old, religious and clerics, prelates and subjects, masters and servants. All, both in body and soul, lie under this curse.” Yet even so, “in the midst of the wicked a few souls have been preserved who are Mine; whose good works restrain Me from commanding . . . the earth to swallow up these wretches; the animals to devour them; the devils to carry them away, body and soul.” Special instances are given of cases in which priests have become usurers; of incantations used by others who had sold themselves to the devil; of vile practices employed by unworthy priests in cases of possession, real or imaginary. Impurity, pride, and avarice are the three chief sins of which in every form the Church is declared guilty by the Eternal Truth.

One truly terrible chapter (c. 125) is devoted to the state of the Religious Orders who, “established in Holy Religion like angels, are worse than devils.” “Their function is to announce My doctrine . . . and they make only a vain sound of words, producing no fruit in the hearts of their hearers. Their sermons are made up to

please men, and to charm their ears." "Their delight is to adorn their bodies, to decorate their cells, and to run with idle chatter throughout the town. And it happens to them as it does to fish out of water . . . they die. Leaving the cell which should be their home, they go through the streets, visiting the houses of their relations and of other seculars just as they choose, with permission of their Superiors, who give them a long rope in these matters, instead of tying them up closely." The same sins as those of the secular clergy are theirs, with the addition of the violation of their Rule and Constitutions. Their vows are forgotten. "Thus," says Almighty God, "they will receive from Me the just punishment which they have deserved." Yet, if these sinners will return and repent, there is Mercy even for them. Marvellous is the prayer of St. Catherine with which the treatise closes (cc. 134-5). Adoring the Justice and the Mercy of God, she urges that nothing with Him is impossible. So greatly has He loved the world—above all, His priests, His Christs, that He has given His Only Son to ransom its sins. Will it not be more to His glory to bring back these sinners to Himself than to allow them any longer to harden their hearts?

"To you, Eternal Father, all is possible! Although You have created us without our help, You will not save us unless we co-operate with You. I pray You, then, to turn the will of these sinners; to dispose them to will as they ought, and as they do not. I ask it of Your Infinite Mercy. From nothing have You created us. Now that we exist, have Mercy upon us; repair these vessels that You have formed in Your own Image and Likeness. Restore them to Grace, through Mercy, and through the Blood of Your Son, Christ, Sweet Jesus."

Fra Raimondo, in the *Legenda* (iii, 3), crystallizes the Dialogue in a marvellous manner into a few pages, from which we draw the following aspirations in which St. Catherine expresses her whole soul:

"O Eternal Trinity! O Deity! . . . deep sea in which the more I search the more I find; and the more I find the more I search, so that my soul is never satiated, but is always eager, always famished for You, Eternal Trinity,

because it desires to see Your Light, and all things in that Light ! As the thirsty hind pants for the fountains of living waters so my soul desires to escape from its obscure prison, to contemplate You as You are, in the reality of Your existence. How long will You conceal Your Countenance from me, O Eternal Trinity ? Fire and abyss of Charity, dissipate the mists of my material nature, for the knowledge You have given me of Yourself . . . makes me long to be delivered from all terrestrial bonds. I thirst to give this life for the Honour and Glory of Your Name ; having tasted and witnessed with the eyes of my understanding the depth and the beauty of Your Greatness . . . O Eternal Father, You have communicated to my understanding the Wisdom that appertains to Your Only Son ; and the Holy Ghost, Who proceeds from You and Your Only Son hath bestowed on me the will that renders me capable of loving You. For You, O Eternal Trinity, are my Creator, and I am Your creature . . .

“ O Abyss ! O Eternal Deity ! O unfathomable sea ! Could You give me more than Yourself ? You are an ever-burning Fire, consuming and yet never consumed, dissipating by Your heat all the love the soul bears to itself . . . You are the Light that illumines souls ; and by that Light You have manifested to me Your Truth . . . I implore You, Eternal Father, to enlighten my soul with the torch of Faith ! That Light is an ocean, nourishing the soul that dwells in You. O adorable Trinity ! Sea of Peace whose waters know no storm . . . and in their transparency manifest the Secret Things of God ! . . . That Sea is like a mirror held by the Hand of Your Love before the eyes of my soul ; and in it I perceive that You are the Supreme and Infinite Good, incomprehensible and inestimable. O Beauty above all beauty ! Wisdom above all wisdom ! You are Wisdom herself.

“ O ever-living Trinity ! I know You by the Light of Faith ; and You have taught me by many admirable lessons the way of exalted Perfection. Therefore in that Light, and not in darkness will I serve You . . . Who can mount up to You, and thank You worthily for the ineffable treasure and superabundant favours You have granted me ; and the Doctrine of the Truth You have

revealed to me ? For this Doctrine is a special favour, above the general Grace accorded to mankind . . . You have given to me largely, and You can recognize Your benefits and return thanks to Yourself for them by spreading abroad in my soul the Light of Your Grace, so that in that Light I may testify my gratitude to You. Clothe me, clothe me with Yourself, O Eternal Truth, that I may run my mortal career in the verity of Obedience, and in the Light of Holy Faith, with which You have inebriated my soul ! ”

(2)

THE year 1378 was a fruitful one as regarded St. Catherine's literary activities. More of her letters can be definitely assigned to this period than to any other.¹ Not only had her circle of friends grown larger, and her interests become more extended by her journeys ; but the condition of Christendom was calling forth all her energies as a champion of the Holy Father. Letters to spiritual and temporal rulers, as well as to her humbler friends, such as Francesco and Agnese Pippino in Florence, fell fast from the pens of her secretaries ; and the dates of many have fortunately been preserved. The Saint took a deep interest in the unstable and faithless Queen Giovanna of Naples ; and of the seven long letters addressed by her to this notorious woman, to whose protection Clement VII was to flee when Sant' Angelo surrendered, that of October 7th, 1378, is one of the most interesting. Giovanna had every reason to feel personal gratitude towards Urban, who had been her friend and adviser before she succeeded to the Neapolitan crown at the age of nineteen ; and St. Catherine does not forget this fact. Much of the letter is in the form of an apostrophe to the schismatic Cardinals, who, with excellent reason, were counting on Giovanna's

¹ It is greatly to be regretted that no complete English translation of these wonderful Letters has ever been made ; but all the most important have been translated (in some cases very freely) by St. Catherine's two great English biographers. Miss V. D. Scudder has also translated some seventy-three of these Letters (*Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, Dent, 1911).

support ; and this portion is a restatement of the letter to the three Italian Cardinals already quoted. Then Catherine turns to address the Queen directly, warning her of the punishment which in this life as well as the next, must fall on the aiders and abettors of the Schism.

“Do not wait for this punishment, for it will be a terrible one for those who resist God. This, my very dear Mother, is the truth. I say ‘dear,’ so long as you remain what you have been, the faithful servant of Holy Church, who, as you know, has nourished you at her breast. I have told you the truth—these men have chosen the office of the devil ; and as far as I can learn, that which they are themselves they want to make you. They desire to turn you, his daughter, from the obedience and respect which you owe to your Father, Pope Urban VI, who is the true Christ on earth ; and any other who shall claim this dignity during his lifetime is worse than anti-Christ. Doubt not this truth, which is so evident that it was recognized by the very electors, who now deny it because of their human passions. If it was not the truth they would not have asked for and received favours from him ; for they must have known he could not grant them unless he was Pope. But because he could they asked for them and made use of them. If you refuse to believe this, you are blind . . . You change light into darkness if you believe that Pope Urban VI is not . . . the Christ on earth, the Minister of the Blood of Christ Who is in heaven . . . You take darkness for light when you give your aid and protection to these guilty men. I do not attack their dignity, but their vices and crimes ; for they have made another Pope, and now it is said . . . that you believe him really to be Pope . . . Do not wait for the stroke of Divine Justice, but prefer death rather than treason to the Holy Father. If you will not assist him in his needs God will require it at your hand ; but even if you do nothing to help him you ought at least to remain neutral, and not act against him, so long as this truth which you do not yet see is not clear to your sight. By doing this you show that you have the True Light, that you have lost your weakness as a woman, and that you have the courage of a man. If because of your lack of light you follow the other road

you show that you are an irresolute woman ; you will grow weak because you are separated from your Head—from Christ Jesus in Heaven, and from the Christ on earth Who strengthens you."

At the end of this long letter, Catherine writes : " I have discharged my conscience. I am certain that God has given you intelligence to know the Truth, if only you will. In knowing it you will love it, and if you love it you can never offend against it. Bathe yourself in the Blood of Jesus Crucified ; it is there that all self-love and self-pleasing are consumed . . . Forgive me if I have troubled you at too great length, but love of your salvation, and the deep grief into which I am plunged by the present state of the Holy Church, must be my excuse. If I could, I would use deeds rather than words regarding those who are spreading so great a heresy in the mystical Body of the Church, and throughout the whole of Christendom.

" Above all, I will use the arms of prayer. My own is feeble enough, on account of all my faults, but those of other servants of God are strong, and the iniquity of worldly men cannot resist them. So strong are they that not only will they triumph over men, but they will bind the Hands of Divine Justice by appeasing the anger of God, and inclining Him to Mercy to the world."

In another letter to Giovanna, written at the end of November, directly after St. Catherine's arrival in Rome—the Queen having meanwhile given flagrant proof of her Clementine sympathies—the Saint writes in even stronger terms, warning Giovanna that death may be the consequence of her sin if she persists in Schism. This prediction was fulfilled when Giovanna was murdered by the order of her Urbanist kinsman, Charles of Durazzo, in May, 1382. Speaking in this letter of Clement and his followers, Catherine writes : " You cannot be so ignorant, so separated from the True Light, as not to know their guilty life, which is wholly without fear of God. Those who have persuaded you into this heresy are trees whose true nature is revealed by their fruits ; their own conduct proves them liars. Their counsellors, whether friends or strangers, may be learned, but they are not holy men ; and their life, so far from being praiseworthy, deserves

rather reproach, and that for many reasons. Where is the just man they have chosen for antipope, if the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Urban VI is not truly the Vicar of Christ? Whom have they chosen? A man of holy life? No, but a guilty man, a devil; for he holds the office of a devil . . . Why did they not choose a just man? Because they knew that a just man would rather die than accept their proposal . . . If you tell me that in spite of all these things you are not convinced, why do you not at least remain neutral?

“I long for your salvation with all my soul, but . . . if you do not renounce this error and other sins . . . the Sovereign judge will punish you in such a way that all rebels against Holy Church will be terrified . . . You must die, and you know not the hour. Neither your riches, nor your power, nor your worldly honours, nor the barons and people who are your temporal subjects can protect you from the wrath of Almighty God, and shield you from Divine Justice. Sometimes indeed God takes them as His executioners, that so He may punish His enemies. You have excited, and are still exciting, your subjects [against Urban], and they are more against you than with you, because they do not believe in your truth. They have found in you, not a generous and virile heart, but that of a weak woman without firmness, a heart like a leaf in the wind.” She reminds the Queen how solemnly she had caused the election of Urban to be observed: “As is fitting in a son when his father is exalted, in a mother when her son is honoured—for the Supreme Pontiff is both your Father and your son—your son, because he is a subject of your kingdom, your Father by the dignity just conferred upon him.” What excuse can Giovanna give for her sudden change of front? “Poor little sheep, return to the fold, and be guided by the Good Shepherd!” writes the dyer’s daughter to the Queen of Naples. “Dearest mother, still there is time to escape the Justice of God. Return to the Obedience of Holy Church; recognize the evil you have done; humble yourself under the Mighty Hand of God, and God will look upon the humility of His servant.”

One other chief factor in the Schism, the Spanish

Cardinal Pedro de Luna, a man of fair promise, of holy life and profound learning, had now definitely joined the Clementine faction. He was later to become the irconcilable Benedict XIII, who refused to abdicate even at the appeal of a General Council. To him, as if she knew the further terrible danger to the Church in his person, St. Catherine had already written, while yet he was attached to Urban VI, imploring him to do all in his power to prevent the threatening Schism. "My soul," she says, "desires to see you so strong that nothing will hold you back from bringing help and succour to the weak." But this letter, like so many of her most passionate appeals, was destined to fall upon irresponsible ears and hearts. Such was the fate of an urgent letter addressed to Gaetano, Count of Fondi, under whose protection the election of Clement had taken place. In this the Saint begged her "very dear Father and Brother in Christ, Sweet Jesus," to return humbly and speedily to the Fold of the Church, lest he should forfeit his eternal as well as his temporal welfare. "For truly at the bottom of your heart you know that Urban VI is the true Pope, and he who says the contrary is a heretic reprov'd of God, no longer a faithful Catholic, but a renegade who has renounced his faith . . . Nay, even if the Pope should prove a cruel Father to us, should he drive us away from him with hard words, persecuting us from one end of the world to the other, we should not forget this, and persecute the Truth in return."

From such appeals as these—knowing their fruitlessness—we may turn almost with relief to other letters written with a very different purpose—the spiritual direction of one or another of St. Catherine's numerous disciples, both men and women. Her six letters to Ristoro Canigiani of Florence, Barduccio's married brother, form one compendious whole, a mirror of perfection for every Christian layman, whether of the fourteenth or of the twentieth century. Those to Francesco Pippino are, though short, full of wisdom and tenderness, as are those to Monna Agnese, the good tailor's wife, whom she gently restrains from undue austerities: "Bathe thyself in the Blood of Jesus Crucified," writes Catherine to the pious

woman who had sheltered her in her hour of peril ; “ when thou canst give thy time to prayer, I pray thee do not fail therein. Love also in charity every reasonable creature. I beg thee, moreover, and command thee not to fast, except on the days set apart by Holy Church, and only then if it be possible for thee. Do not attempt to fast when thou feelest thyself unable ; and otherwise, if thou art able, fast only on Saturday. When the hot weather is over, then fast, if thou canst, on all the Feasts of Our Lady, but not on other days. Do not reduce thyself to drinking plain water only, every day. Force thyself to increase thy holy desires, and torment not thyself as to the rest . . . When it pleases the Divine Goodness we shall meet again.”

This letter alone would refute in Catherine's case the foolish charge so often brought against the Saints: that they desired everyone to imitate their own austerities. But St. Catherine's Letters of Spiritual Direction are a mine of common sense and helpful advice to those who care to read them.

It is with great regret we find ourselves obliged to omit a number of letters written by the Saint to religious women. To these, among which are some of the most delightful she ever composed, a whole chapter might easily be devoted. It has been said by one of the Saint's many French biographers, that her Life might well be written from her letters ; and this is certainly true of the last two years she spent on earth. One letter to a nun must, however, be quoted in part. Sister Daniella of Orvieto, a correspondent and disciple of Catherine's, had written to beg her if she came to Rome—and rumours to this effect were current towards the close of 1378—that she would pass by way of Orvieto.

“ Cease not,” writes St. Catherine in answer, “ to pray for the Vicar of Jesus Christ, that God will give Him light and strength to resist the attacks of those incarnate demons who love themselves only, and who strive to defile the Faith. It is truly time to weep. As far as my visit is concerned, pray that God may do what is most for His Honour and the salvation of souls, particularly now when I am going to Rome to fulfil the Will of Christ Crucified and of His Vicar. I cannot say by which road I shall

travel. Pray Christ, Sweet Jesus, that He will lead me by that which shall be most to His Glory, for the peace and rest of your souls."

The summons to Rome had, indeed, already reached Catherine. "The Sovereign Pontiff," says Raimondo, "who had seen Catherine at Avignon when he was Archbishop of Acerenza, and who had a very high esteem for her wisdom and virtues, commanded me to write to her, bidding her come to Rome. I obeyed, but she, with her usual prudence, answered me thus: 'Father, several people in Siena, and even some of the Sisters of my Order, think that I travel too frequently. Hence they are greatly scandalized, saying that a Religious ought not to be ever thus on the wing. I do not think I need reproach myself for this, for I have never journeyed anywhere except by order of God, and of His Vicar, to promote the salvation of souls. But to avoid as far as possible any occasion of scandal I had not intended again to leave this place. Nevertheless, if the Vicar of Christ bids me come, His Will, not mine, be done. In that case I beg that he will make known his will by a written document, so that I can show it to those who are scandalized, and prove to them that I am not taking this journey from any impulse of my own.'"

From Rocca d'Orcia, some twelve months earlier, St. Catherine had written to her old friend Messer Matteo, of the Misericordia, who had been one of those to complain of her too frequent absences, on this very subject. "Look at the Saints, who travelled about or stayed at home as it seemed best to them for the Glory of God. You may be sure that whether they stayed at home, or whether they travelled about, they always incurred endless murmurings! . . . The more opposition one encounters, the more perfect does one's work become. Be faithful little sheep. Be not afraid of your own shadow, and do not believe I have left ninety and nine of you for the sake of one. I tell you, on the contrary, that for each one of those I leave I have ninety and nine who are only known to the Divine Goodness, to Charity Incarnate; and this is the secret goal which helps me to support the fatigues of the journey, the burden of infirmities, the weight of scandal and murmurings, all for the Glory and

Honour of God. Whether I go or whether I stay, I do it in accordance with His Will always, and not with that of man."

Again and again had these murmurs been raised against Catherine by the jealous tongues which are always ready when the conduct of a servant of God is called in question; and which are always to be found in the neighbourhood of Religious houses. Even her friends, from a very different motive, had expressed discontent at her absence. But nowhere do we find these complaints so sweetly and gently refuted as in this letter to Messer Matteo; and Catherine, who had doubtless heard reports of the strife of tongues occasioned by her recent long absences in Florence and in Rocca d'Orcia, was too generous to complain of particular persons; as well as too prudent and tenderhearted to "scandalize" them any further.

Having received her letter, Fra Raimondo went to the Pope, and humbly communicated to him St. Catherine's message. "He charged me to bid Catherine to come in the name of holy Obedience, and like a submissive daughter she speedily arrived in Rome." (Advent Sunday, November 28th, 1378.) "She brought with her a numerous company, and would have had many more with her had she not refused them. Those who accompanied her wore the garb of Poverty by voluntarily relying on Divine Providence; choosing rather to beg their daily bread with the Saint than to have abundance in their own homes, and so lose her pious and holy conversation.

"The Sovereign Pontiff was greatly rejoiced to see her, and requested that, in presence of the Cardinals, she would give them an instruction, and speak especially upon the Schism now beginning. This she did with much learning and at some length, earnestly exhorting everyone present to fortitude and constancy. She shewed that Divine Providence watches over all, but in a particular manner over those who suffer with the Church; and from this argued that the threatened Schism ought not to terrify anyone, but that each should continue to work for God, dreading nothing. When she had finished, the Sovereign Pontiff, greatly encouraged, summed up her discourse, saying to the Cardinals: 'Behold, brethren, how guilty

we become before God when we yield to timidity. This humble little woman confounds us. I call her humble, not by reason of contempt, but on account of the weakness of her sex. Even were we of good heart she might naturally fear; and yet, while we are fearful, she is not only calm, but inspires us with courage. Ought not this to fill our hearts with shame? What should the Vicar of Jesus Christ dread, though the whole world were to oppose him? Is not Christ the Omnipotent stronger than the world? He can never forsake the Church.' Thus the Sovereign Pontiff encouraged himself and the Cardinals; he praised the Saint in the Name of God, and accorded to herself and her companions many spiritual favours."

The day after Catherine's arrival the Pope issued a Bull, anathematizing and excommunicating Clement and his Cardinals, as well as the leaders of the *condottieri* employed by them. The excommunication did not extend to Pedro de Luna, nor to the three Italian Cardinals, who had not yet openly broken with Rome, and whom Urban was above all anxious to retain, though their attitude was unmistakable. His own situation was most insecure. He was at present living at Sta Maria in Trastevere, as the French garrison still held Sant' Angelo for Clement, and Urban could not thus reside at the Vatican. The castle was being vigorously besieged by the Romans at the time of St. Catherine's arrival, and the Eternal City was full of the clash of arms, both without and within. Urban's first thought, after having secured Catherine's presence, was to make use of her as an ambassador to Queen Giovanna, whose conduct had now placed her sympathies, if not her convictions, beyond all doubt. An antipope who could command the allegiance of Naples as well as that of France would be a terrible danger to the Pope if he remained in Rome. Urban felt that Giovanna's adherence must be secured by every possible means. She was now, says Raimondo, favouring the Schism by every act in her power. But Catherine was not to be dispatched alone on such an errand. "Urban VI thought of sending with her another Virgin, also called Catherine, daughter of St. Bridget of Sweden, who was recently placed in the Calendar of Saints by Pope Boniface IX. The Supreme

Pontiff hoped that these two persons with whom the Queen was acquainted might induce her to forsake her evil ways.

"When the Blessed Catherine knew it she did not shrink from the charge, and offered to go directly. But Catherine of Sweden . . . refused in my very presence the mission that was proposed to her." The beautiful Swedish princess, the very antithesis to her fellow St. Catherine, a silent, mysterious figure, subject to fits of deep depression and sadness, remembered with horror the Court of Giovanna as she had seen it with her mother on that eventful journey, when St. Bridget had prayed that her eldest son Charles might die rather than fall into the toils of the Neapolitan sorceress. For Giovanna had fallen passionately in love at first sight with the splendid young Viking, and though both he and she were married she had coolly proposed to him that each should seek a divorce as a preliminary to their own union ! Bridget's prayer was answered, and the death of Charles put an end to the intrigue ; but Catherine of Sweden, pure and cold as one of her own northern snow-drifts, remembered with sick terror the meretricious luxury of Giovanna's surroundings, and, as we know, refused point-blank to go to Naples. Fra Raimondo, himself a subject of Giovanna, with whose career he was perfectly acquainted, tells us that at first, "through imperfection and want of faith," he was disposed to agree with the Swedish princess. He believed that Giovanna would hesitate at nothing to discredit the honour of Urban's ambassadors were it to her interest to do so, and he opened his mind so plainly to the Holy Father on this subject that Urban, after consideration, said : "You are right ; it is better for them not to go."

But Catherine of Siena, who knew no fear, all burning with the desire to serve God and to shed her blood for the Church, was broken-hearted. She was very ill when Fra Raimondo came to the little house which she and her companions occupied in the Rione della Colonna and told her the Pope's decision. "She turned to me and said : 'Had Agnes, Margaret, and a multitude of other virgins indulged in these considerations they would never have obtained the crown of martyrdom. Have we not a Spouse Who can deliver us from the hands of the wicked, and preserve our

honour amid a throng of dissolute men ? All these arguments are useless ; they arise from a want of faith rather than from prudence.' I blushed to think I was so remote from her own lofty perfection, and in my heart I desired to possess her constancy and faith. But as the Sovereign Pontiff had decided that she should not go, I did not dare to prolong the conversation."

This touch is truly characteristic of Fra Raimondo, whose chief, if not only, defect lay in a certain timidity wholly incomprehensible to Catherine's fiery courage. It had been her greatest natural consolation in coming to Rome, to think of meeting again this beloved "father of her soul," with whom she could share the deepest secrets of her heart, and who could understand and sympathize with her more perfectly than any other. But now her friend and master, her "Father and her son," was to be taken from her, almost as soon as she arrived in Rome, and hers was to be the voice to bid him go, hers the hand to speed him on his way. For Urban, now that the embassy to Giovanna had been abandoned, turned his thoughts to France, where his envoys had hitherto served him so faithlessly, and where Charles V, apparently in good faith, was now openly abetting the Schism. The Holy Father had not far to seek an ambassador on whom he could rely. His choice fell on the Prior of the Minerva, and he, with one companion, was commanded to set out for Paris. A third envoy was to join the party on its way to France ; and Fra Raimondo was the bearer of briefs not only to the King, but to the University of Paris and to several ecclesiastics and nobles. The story of these last days must be told in his own touching words :

"The instant that I became acquainted with this project I went to take counsel from Catherine. Notwithstanding the affliction which the thought of my absence caused her, she bade me obey the orders of the Sovereign Pontiff without delay. 'Hold it as certain, Father,' she said to me, 'that he is the Vicar of Jesus Christ. I pray you to expose your very life for him as you would for the Catholic Faith itself.' I had entertained no doubt on this subject, but this saying from Catherine so encouraged me to combat the Schism that from that

moment I consecrated myself to defend the rights of the Sovereign Pontiff ; and I continually recalled her words to mind in order to fortify myself amid my difficulties and trials. I acted, therefore, upon her counsels, and bowed my head beneath the yoke of Obedience.

“Some days previous to my departure” (early in December, 1378), “being aware of what would happen, she wished to converse with me concerning the revelations and consolations that she had received from God ; and she did not allow those present to join in our conversation. After having spoken to me during several hours, she said to me : ‘ Now go whither God calls you ! I think that in this life we shall never meet again ; never talk together like this.’ Her prediction was accomplished. I departed, she remained. Before my return she had gone to her Heavenly Home, and I had no more the privilege of enjoying and profiting by her holy instructions. It was doubtless for this reason that, desiring to bid me a last farewell, she went to the place where I was to embark ; and when we were setting out she knelt down, and after praying, made over us with tears the sign of the Cross, as if she would say : ‘ Go, my son, in safety, shielded by this blessed sign ; but in this life never again shalt thou behold thy mother.’ Although the sea was infested by pirates ” —the galleys of Clement were indeed on the look-out for any Urbanist emissaries, especially round Civita Vecchia and Livorno—“ we arrived safely at Pisa, and thence had an equally prosperous journey to Genoa, notwithstanding the numerous galleys of the Schismatics who were making their way to Avignon. We afterwards continued our journey by land as far as a town called Ventimiglia. Had we gone further we should have fallen into the hands of those who had special designs upon my life, but by the permission of God we stopped there one day, and a Religious of my Order, who was a native of the place, forwarded me a letter in which he said : ‘ Beware of passing Ventimiglia, for ambushes are prepared for you, and were you to fall into any one of them no human aid could save you from death.’ ”

On receiving this warning Fra Raimondo returned to Genoa. His companion, who had been taken prisoner, as

well as the third envoy who was to have met them, shortly afterwards joined the party of Clement. Urban appeared quite satisfied with Raimondo's action, and, at his bidding, the Friar remained in Genoa to preach a Crusade against the Schism. He was there at the time of St. Catherine's death, some sixteen months later.

One of the most pathetic pictures in Catherine's life is that on the shores of the Tiber that December morning, when with tears she took a last farewell of that guide, Father, and friend whom our Lord Himself had given her for her own soul's comfort, and also for the welfare of the whole Dominican Order. For, a few weeks after Catherine's death, Fra Raimondo was elected (May, 1380) Master-General of the Friars Preachers, at Bologna, in opposition to Fra Elias of Toulouse, who had joined the Schism with a large following of Friars. During his long term of office (1380-99) Raimondo was enabled to carry out the reforms which the Order so greatly needed, inspired and encouraged by the memory of this "special" spiritual child of his whom he loved to call "Mother," and whom he revered as a Saint.

Perhaps, as the galley sailed down the Tiber, and the little group of weeping friends faded from sight upon the grey shore, Raimondo's faithful heart hoped that for once Catherine was mistaken, and that after all they might meet again. But Catherine knew that this was not to be. Already her great, generous soul was arming for the final conflict, and she made haste to lay aside every human attachment that might delay her entrance into the joy of her Lord. Yet, as he went forth on his dangerous mission, and for the last time she blessed him and signed him with the Cross, Fra Raimondo knew the bitterness of her grief, and—it is he who tells us—saw the tears in her eyes.

(3)

AT Pisa, Fra Raimondo had found a letter from St. Catherine, sent overland, full of tender counsel and consolation, urging him to undertake fearlessly the great work committed to him by Urban VI, without any human respect. "Silence,

my soul, say no more!" ends the letter; "I do not want to tell you things which would be hard to say or to write, my dearest Father. Let my silence show you all that I mean, and wish to say. I cease. I long for you to be back in this garden, helping me to root out the thorns."

But when the news came from Genoa that Raimondo had been forced to turn back at Ventimiglia, all Catherine's soul was roused to indignation! Tenderly as she loved her confessor, she longed above all things to see him strong and valiant, ready to lay down his life for the Church. It seemed to her that he had lost a glorious opportunity. "I write to you in the Precious Blood," runs her next letter: "desiring to see you no longer a child, but a full-grown man, nourished no longer with milk, but with the bread of the strong. For the sucking-child cannot fight upon the battlefield; he can only play with other babes . . . but when he becomes a man he eats this bread with the mouth of holy desire, biting it with the teeth of hatred and love: the harder and thicker it is, the more he likes it . . . He has grown strong, and strong himself, he speaks with the strong . . . With them he hastens to the battlefield; his only pleasure to fight for the Truth; his only happiness, to suffer; and with the ardour of St. Paul to glory in the tribulations which he endures for the sake of the Eternal Truth. Those who thus refuse to live on milk bear upon them, shining like jewels, the Stigmata of Christ. In the midst of tempests they find calm; in bitterness, sweetness . . . By suffering hunger, nakedness, blows, abuse, and insults they grow mighty in the strength of this immortal nourishment . . . Their bread is coarse, but not dry . . . for they steep it in the Blood of Jesus Crucified, in the Fountain of the Sacred Side . . . They would choose rather to be crucified to their Crucified Lord by pain than by joy. Thus, my sweet and dearly-loved Father . . . God has willed to make known to you the ardour of His Charity, to which, in the Light of Holy Faith, you must abandon yourself more generously, more largely, for His Honour and for the exaltation of Holy Church, and of the true Vicar of Jesus Christ, Pope Urban VI . . . He wished

you to realize your own imperfection by showing you that you are still a sucking-child, and not yet a man who can eat bread. For had He seen that you had teeth to eat it He would have given it to you, as well as to your other companions. Not yet were you worthy to fight on the battlefield; you were put at the back, like a child. Of your own will you fled, thanking God for the mercy He showed your weakness. O! my poor Father! What happiness for your soul and mine if in your blood had been laid one single stone of the Holy Church, through love of the Precious Blood! Truly we have cause for sadness when we see that our lack of virtue has deprived us of so great a glory. Let us lose our milk-teeth, and grow strong teeth of hate and love! Let us take the breastplate of Charity, and the shield of Holy Faith, and run like strong men to the field of battle. Let us be firm and fearless, with the Cross before and behind us, that we may never flee."

Fra Raimondo was deeply moved when he received this letter. He seems to have feared that he had in a certain degree forfeited Catherine's love, if not her respect, and he wrote to ask if this were so. Her reply showed him that between his soul and that of Catherine no misunderstanding could prevail. So completely does she put herself in his place that it almost seems as if she, as well as he, had acted with greater prudence than courage at Ventimiglia. But still her passionate love for truth will not allow her to leave him in doubt as to the motive of her former letter:

"It seems to me from what you say that you have suffered much interiorly from the cunning of the devil, and the hyper-sensitiveness of your soul. You have fancied the burden was too heavy for you to carry, and that I had measured your strength by my own. You have thought, too, that my affection for you was lessened, but there you are wrong. You have shown that my charity has increased, while your own has diminished; for I love you as I love myself, and earnestly I hoped that the goodness of God would supply what was lacking to you. But it has not been thus; for you have found means to release yourself from the burden that was so heavy, and

fall back into weakness and faithlessness. All this I perceived, and it would have been well had I been the only one to perceive it. Thus I have shown you that my love for you increases instead of diminishing . . . But how have you ever been able to believe that I desired anything but the life and health of your soul ? Where is the faith you once had, and which you must always have ? What has happened to your assurance that everything which happens has been planned and decided in the presence of God ; not only the great events, but the smallest circumstances ?

“ If you had been faithful you would not have been hesitating and timid with God or with me. You would have gone straight forward, . . . and if you could not have walked upright you could have crawled on hands and knees ; if you could not have travelled like a Religious, you could have journeyed as a pilgrim ; if you had been penniless, you could have begged . . . However, in spite of your weakness I know that you have always had a good and holy desire to accomplish fully the Will of God, and that of the Christ on earth, Urban VI. I wish, indeed, you had not stopped short ; but that you had pursued your enemy in the way and by the means pointed out to you. As for me, I was occupied day and night with God, and with many affairs which did not succeed because of the lack of zeal shown by those concerned in them ; but above all, because of my iniquities, which are a hindrance to all that is good. Alas ! . . . I live in sadness, imploring the Divine Mercy to take me as soon as may be out of the darkness of this life.”

The Saint goes on to allude to the misfortunes overtaking the Kingdom of Naples, to which, as she had foretold to Raimondo in Rome, the other ills which were in progress were but “ child’s play.” Then she returns to the main subject. “ Yea ! I tell you that I wish above everything in the world that you had continued your journey. Yet I am not greatly troubled, because I am persuaded that nothing happens without some secret purpose of God. My conscience is at peace, for I have done all in my power to send another ambassador to the King of France. May the Clemency of the Holy Spirit bring

to pass that which we, as careless workmen, let slip from our grasp. As to the embassy to King Louis of Hungary, the Holy Father seemed much pleased with the idea. It had been decided that you and your companions should undertake it. I know not what has made him change his mind, but now he wishes you to remain where you are, doing all the good you can. I pray you not to be uneasy."

Catherine impresses upon Fra Raimondo the necessity of death to everything but Christ and His Church. "We have offered ourselves as dead men . . . let us be dead to all the reproaches, injuries, and insults which those who persecute the Church put upon us . . . After all, our earthly life is but a sad affair! We have watered it with our tears; we have not been judged worthy to shed our blood for the Truth. Let it be so no longer; let us renew our life and increase the ardour of our desires. You ask me to pray the Divine Goodness to give you the ardour of St. Vincent, of St. Lawrence, of sweet St. Paul, and of the disciple whom Jesus loved. You tell me that thus you could do great things, and that I should rejoice over you. For this I bless the Eternal Truth, for without this ardour you will do nothing, great or small, and I shall never have joy in you . . . If you had been with me . . . I could have given you other things than words . . . By being faithful you will do great things for God, and accomplish finally the business with which you have been entrusted; and it will be your fault if it does not succeed perfectly . . . I love your soul more than you can understand, and with a great desire have I desired to see you arrive at perfection. Lose yourself in the Blood of Jesus Crucified, and bear with my faults and my scoldings patiently. When anyone shows you your faults, rejoice, and thank the Divine Goodness Who has given you someone who cares for you, and watches over you in His Presence . . . You write that anti-Christ and his members are trying hard to lay hold of you; but do not believe that God will give them the light and power necessary to do so. Moreover, you must judge yourself unworthy of so great a happiness; and you may consequently be quite fearless . . . You have left me here, and you are in God's keeping; but I will never cease to labour for you. I pray you to give

me no cause to blush and weep for your conduct in the Presence of God. You were a man when you promised me to do and to suffer for the Honour of God ; do not be a woman when it comes to keeping your promises ! . . . Be courageous, then, and dare even death itself. I pray you to forgive me if I have said anything against the Honour of God and the respect which I owe you. Love must be my excuse."

It was about the time that Fra Raimondo left Rome that Urban, urged by Catherine, issued a Bull to the Prior of Gorgona commanding him to have Masses and prayers offered for the Pontifical intentions in all Tuscan monasteries of men and women ; and, further, to repair to Rome within a month's time, together with other "servants of God," wise, holy, and devout, that the Sovereign Pontiff might confer with them as to the best measures to be adopted in the present crisis. Most of Catherine's old friends were thus summoned, and to nearly all of them, including the Prior himself, she wrote. She sternly upbraided Father William Flete, who preferred to remain in the solitude of his hermitage at Lecceto, and who considered the Papal command as a device of the devil to deprive a solitary of his hours of peace and contemplation—though, indeed, Father William was working hard in his own way on behalf of Urban VI. Fra Giovanni dalle Celle was another thus summoned, and several other holy hermits and solitaries. All these, as they arrived, apparently came to stay in the house placed at Catherine's disposal by Urban ; joining the large company already assembled there. Lisa, Cecca, Alessia, and Giovanna da Capo had accompanied the Saint ; and Monna Lapa, "Nonna," or Granny, as she was affectionately known to her daughter's disciples, joined them a little later. There was also a goodly company of priests and laymen : Fra Bartolommeo, Fra Santi, and Fra Giovanni Tantucci ; besides Neri, Barduccio, and several others. Stefano, however, was not among them ; and this must have been in time to come the one regret of his life. Family affairs and other business detained him in Siena ; his mother evidently kept a jealous watch on this well-loved son ; and much as he longed to be with Catherine and her "family,"

he did not join them for more than a year—very shortly before the Saint's death.

"Her disciples had followed her," says Fra Raimondo, "as it were, without her permission; some to visit the Holy Places, others to ask some favour from the Sovereign Pontiff, but all to enjoy her society and to listen to her conversation, which was so profitable to their souls. It must also be said that the Pope caused several servants of God to come to Rome, in consequence of a request from Catherine; and she took pleasure in showing them hospitality. She possessed naught in the wide world, having neither purse nor scrip, but begged for alms with her companions. Yet so great was her confidence in God that she would have received a hundred guests as readily as one; for she knew that God's treasury is inexhaustible. Hence at that time she had at least twenty-four persons with her, and at intervals this number was very considerably increased. Catherine established an admirable system in her house. One of her associates was chosen each week to provide for all the domestic arrangements; so that the others might be occupied with God, and accomplish the pious works and holy visits which had led them to Rome."

Here, in the little house in the Rione della Colonna—not that larger one into which Catherine moved later, in which she died, and where her chapel may still be seen—God chose on two occasions to bestow on the Little Company a miraculous gift of bread, such as those of which we read so frequently in the annals of the Dominican Order. The beautiful story of the feeding by angels of the hungry Friars of San Sisto on the Via Appia, in the days of St. Dominic, is still to be traced in fading frescoes half-smothered in hay, around the walls of the very refectory where it took place—to-day a stable.¹ It was the turn of Giovanna da Capo to be housekeeper. The bread eaten in the house, where nearly all the inmates were fasting strictly, was provided by means of daily alms; and Catherine had ordered that the housekeeper should give

¹ It is let, with other portions of St. Dominic's first foundation in the Eternal City, to a funeral-furnishing company, by the municipal government of Rome. The nuns of San Sisto now live, with great discomfort, in a few rooms.

notice a day in advance, when the funds ran low, and the bread would probably fail, "in order that someone, herself or another, should go in quest of more." "God permitted Giovanna to forget this order." When supper time came one day there was not bread enough for four people. She went to Catherine, all sad and sorry, to confess her fault. Gently rebuking her, the Saint bade her summon the servants of God to the table. To Giovanna's objection that there was not enough bread to make it worth dividing, Catherine replied: "Tell them to begin with what there is, and wait till God provides for their necessities." Then she betook herself to prayer. Meantime her guests, "weakened and famished through fasting," came to table, and regretfully observed the tiny fragment of bread that lay before each. "But in vain they ate: they never saw the last piece, for bread always remained upon the table. And in this was there nothing surprising, since it was the Will of Him Who with five loaves satisfied five thousand men in the wilderness."

When they discovered how St. Catherine had been occupied they all exclaimed: "Her prayer has called down Bread from Heaven." So much was left upon the table that it sufficed afterwards for the Sisters and for many others; and the poor received abundant alms. Lisa and Giovanna, who related this miracle to Fra Raimondo—it happened early in 1379—described another similar marvel which took place in the same house, during Lent of the same year, while Cecca was housekeeper.

Busy as Catherine was with her household, her friends, her vast and important correspondence; with audiences of the Holy Father on matters of world-wide importance; above all, as she would have said herself, "with God," she yet found time to visit the Holy Places of the Eternal City, and satisfy her devotion at the tombs of the Apostles and the shrines of the martyrs. Though we have no notification of the fact we cannot doubt that she visited the catacombs, where lie those who first shed their blood for the Church. To her, who so keenly desired martyrdom, this must have been a favourite place of pilgrimage. But above all she must have loved the Dominican churches and monasteries; following the footsteps of St. Dominic along

the Via Appia to San Sisto; across the Aventine hill to Santa Sabina, where she would have seen his orange-tree—then only a hundred and sixty years old—and many of his precious relics. She would have loved, too, the stately beauty of the Minerva, unique among Roman churches, which would have recalled to her in its Gothic grandeur the not less beautiful aisles of Santa Maria Novella, at Florence, the church in which so many graces had been granted to her. One cannot refrain from wondering if it was ever revealed to her that her body was one day to lie beneath the High Altar of the church of which Fra Raimondo had been twice Prior. At least she would remember her prophecy to him, made at Varazze, that he would himself one day remove her body from one grave to another. If Rome is the Holy of Holies, even to the most casual Catholic pilgrim, what must it not have been to Catherine? It is a happiness to remember that after her life of bitter strife and toil, though she was never able to fulfil her heart's desire and visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, she was yet long enough in the Eternal City to know it, literally, by heart.

Not all the counsels of the wise and holy men with whom Urban VI had surrounded himself had had so far much effect on influencing the course of the Schism. Men were growing daily bitterer, more sorehearted, as both sides had recourse to arms, and the Great Schism seemed likely to produce a great war. Though later on several of the less-important kingdoms at present undecided declared for Clement, Urban was still Pope of the greater portion of Christendom. It is a matter for thankfulness to know that England was wholly faithful to the Holy See from the outset, and that not, as has been hinted, from jealous hatred of France, but from supreme conviction of the truth. This was set out clearly and plainly by the Council of the young King Richard II in the *Rationes Anglicorum*, a document which could not be satisfactorily refuted by the University of Paris.¹ But everywhere men's hearts were failing them for fear, and as on more than one occasion in the history of the Church, it was publicly rumoured that

¹ See, for the whole question of England's attitude to the Schism, Drane, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-511. The *Rationes Anglicorum* are here quoted in full.

the end of the world was nigh, and that anti-Christ was already come.

Meanwhile the attitude of the three Italian Cardinals was causing great anxiety to both parties. Though they had evidently favoured Clement they had never broken with Urban until some five months after the election of the antipope. To the period of their hesitation belongs the fiery letter addressed to them in their retreat at Tagliacozzo by St. Catherine, shortly after her arrival in Rome. Their appeal was to a General Council; and though finally Cardinals Borzano and Corsini joined the Clementine faction, Orsini, who died in the summer of 1379, declared on his deathbed that he acknowledged as true Pope him who should be approved by such a Council, and none other.

But Rome itself was a centre of disturbance. The French garrison still held Sant' Angelo for Clement, in spite of the Roman attacks; but it was eventually forced to yield, as it was impossible for the mercenaries employed by the antipope to come to its assistance. The victory of Marino, just after Easter, 1379, when the *condottieri* employed by Urban defeated and routed the Clementine free-lances, caused frantic rejoicings in Rome; and in all this sorrow and joy Catherine had her part. "She saw the Church of God that she so dearly loved," says Raimondo, "rent by the miseries of Schism; and the Vicar of Jesus Christ beset by difficulties and threatened by persecutions. Tears had become her bread day and night. She never ceased to cry to God, supplicating Him to restore Peace to the Church. God gave her some consolations. Thus, a year previous to her death . . . He granted a double victory to the Church and to the Sovereign Pontiff. The Schismatics, hitherto masters of the Castle of Sant' Angelo, disturbed the peace of the city, and ravaged the entire country. They were completely vanquished; their chiefs were taken, and many perished. The Pope had not been able to reside at the Vatican, on account of its nearness to Sant' Angelo. Catherine advised him to go in solemn procession [from Sta Maria in Trastevere] to the Basilica of St. Peter. All the people followed him with great devotion, rendering

solemn thanksgiving to Almighty God for all His benefits. The Holy Church and our Pontiff began to breathe a little ; and in their relief our Saint enjoyed at last some consolation."

The Romans, however, to whom Sant' Angelo had surrendered, were by no means disposed to hand over the fortress to Urban, as the Pope requested. They decided to dismantle and destroy it ; and the Holy Father, unable to resist them, was forced to consent. He was able, on the other hand, to take possession of the Vatican, which he did some thirteen months after his coronation, at Whitsuntide, 1379. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the anti-pope had decided to seek Giovanna's protection. But so terrible an uproar was caused among the hot-blooded Neapolitans by the presence of the Schismatics that Clement escaped with some difficulty from their hands. He reached Avignon, after a wearisome and dangerous journey, about the same time that Urban took up his residence at the Vatican.

To Urban's cause, the loyalty of even the smallest cities and communes was matter of vital interest. Catherine was naturally greatly occupied with the case of Siena, which had from the first declared for Urban ; but while acknowledging his authority in all things spiritual declared itself unable to help him with men or with money for his war. Yet, by the terms of the peace made by Urban with the city (1378), after the removal of the censures under which Siena lay for its alliance with Florence and for joining the League, the city was bound to do this. Nevertheless, all the endeavours made by Clement to stir up treason in the City of the Virgin were in vain. For it had come to this : that with the help of Hungary and Poland, and of all the alliances that he could raise in Italy, Urban was now considering the advisability of crushing the Schism by force of arms. The forces thus at his disposal were first to be employed against Naples, now the headquarters in Italy of the Schismatics, who were openly protected by Giovanna. But Catherine still had hopes of the apostate Queen, and through her influence an embassy was sent to Naples, consisting of Neri di Landoccio and another of her disciples, who bore with them her last letter

of expostulation to Giovanna. Alas! both letter and embassy were in vain.

Catherine was now deprived of three of her dearest friends. Fra Raimondo was at Genoa, Neri at Naples, while Stefano was still in Siena. It is clear from her letters to Stefano how greatly she longed for his presence; and his own show how much he desired to join her. Her letters to him are full of delightful, friendly details, of messages to friends in Siena, of messages from his friends in Rome to Stefano himself. His never-failing cheerfulness and gaiety must have been greatly missed by Catherine during this trying year (1379). Yet she never complained of his absence, or pressed him to come to her, though she knew well that a word would have brought him, had she expressed her desire outright. "I send the letter which I have written to the Signoria [of Siena]," she writes to him in 1379; "and another to the Company of Mary. Read them both, and profit by them; then take them to those who should receive them, and speak to each as thou mayest find occasion; urging everyone for the sake of Jesus Crucified and for my sake to work with all his power . . . for Holy Church and for the Vicar of Christ, Pope Urban VI. For my part, I can only regret that all this turmoil is necessary . . . for the spiritual and temporal interests of the town. Try not to be lukewarm, but eager in stirring up the Brethren and heads of the Company to do their best as to the subject on which I write. Wert thou what thou oughtest to be thou couldst raise the whole of Italy! It is not so very difficult!"

The letter to the *Riformati* of Siena, which accompanies this, is couched in strong language. "Let no man hesitate," concludes the Saint, "nor be deceived of the devil, listening to those who say: 'Perhaps he is Pope, perhaps he is not!' Do not act thus, for the Love of God, but believe firmly and lovingly that Urban VI is our Holy Father and Pope, in spite of all who tell you the contrary. You must obey him, assist him, and if needs be, die for him, so that you uphold this truth. By the assistance you give him I shall see if the Most Holy Faith is alive in you; and if you are faithful to Holy Church, and to our sweet Holy Father."

An even more touching appeal than that to Siena was made by St. Catherine to the Gonfaloniere and Signoria of Florence, reminding them of their ingratitude to Urban—who had granted them the peace they had sought in vain from Gregory XI—by their neglect to pay the fine which had been imposed upon the Lily City ; and by their general slackness in responding to his appeal for help. Much as St. Catherine must have hated the idea of settling the affairs of Holy Church by force of arms, she was too splendidly loyal to neglect any means of forwarding Urban's cause which he approved. To her, ingratitude was a very deadly sin. "Whence does it come?" she asks the Florentines. "From self-love, which destroys charity and engenders pride, making a man believe that all that he has that is good comes from himself, and not from God." How can they show their gratitude to God, Who has done such great things for them? "It is a debt which each one is bound to pay, as also to be submissive and obedient to Holy Church, and to assist her by every means in his power. If we are bound to succour our neighbour in his needs, how much more our Mother, Holy Church, and our Father, the Christ on earth?

"To this gratitude I invite you, for it seems to me that up till now you have shown it but little . . . In spite of all these faults of yours which deserved punishment, you have received mercy. You have been brought back to the Bosom of Holy Church ; and if you will, you may receive the Precious Blood through Pope Urban VI, the true Sovereign Pontiff, and Vicar of Christ on earth. He has pardoned you and absolved you in all charity ; granting all that you wished ; treating you not like children who have revolted against their Father, but like children who have done no wrong. And now that you see him in such great distress, not only do you not help him, but you do not even do what you had pledged yourselves to do. Thus you give proof of great ingratitude, as to which I much fear if you do not alter, that God will permit you to be punished by your own people, as has already happened . . . This is the only means of possessing your State. You will lose it by ingratitude . . . Sleep no more on this bed of ingratitude, but show thankfulness to God for

Holy Church, and towards our Father Urban VI. Thus you will be blessed, and you will preserve both your temporal and your spiritual goods . . . Render to each that which is due to him. Forgive my ignorance. I have been urged to write to you by my love for your salvation. The Divine Goodness forced me to do it. Sweet Jesus. Jesus, Love."

CHAPTER VII

THE VISION OF PEACE

(1380)

(1)

IT was about Christmas-time (1379) that St. Catherine sent to Pope Urban VI, whose arbitrary harshness and unwisdom were steadily alienating even his most loyal supporters, a charming little gift of five oranges, gilded and preserved in the dainty Tuscan fashion, by her own hands. The present was accompanied by a letter, in which the Saint points out the symbolic meaning of her oranges—a meaning which Urban would probably otherwise not have perceived.

“I write with the earnest desire of seeing you delivered from the bitter pains which afflict your soul,” she tells him. “May the cause of this pain disappear, so that only that sweet suffering may remain which nourishes and strengthens the soul, because it comes from the Fire of Divine Charity.” This sweet pain is grief over our sins, and at the crimes which are daily being committed against God. Those who feel this “sweet bitterness” reject the bitter, keeping only the sweet, and seeking only that God’s Will may be done. “Abandon yourself to this sweet bitterness,” writes Catherine, “for it will be followed by the tenderest consolation. Be a tree of Love grafted on the Tree of Life, Christ, Sweet Jesus . . . The fruit of this tree will ripen in hunger for the Honour of God and the salvation of souls. This fruit seems bitter at first in the mouth of holy desire, but when the soul has firmly decided to suffer for Jesus Crucified, even unto death, it becomes sweet indeed. I have often noticed this in the orange, which tastes bitter at first, but when the pulp is taken out and conserved, the water in which it is cooked draws out the bitterness . . . Where has the bitterness gone?

Into the fire and the water. So it is, most Holy Father, with a soul which greatly longs after Holiness. The approaches seem bitter, because the soul is still imperfect." The remedy is in the Precious Blood. "The water of Grace contained therein draws out all the bitterness of self-love and sensuality. And since the Blood is ever mingled with Fire, since it was shed with the Fire of Love, it may truly be said that the Fire and the Water draw out the bitterness which the soul at first perceived . . . When the orange is conserved and prepared within it is gilded without. This is the gold of Purity, shining with bright Charity, showing itself by great patience in the service of its neighbour, bearing his defects with great tenderness, and supporting itself with this bitter-sweetness which all offences against God . . . must cause to the soul."

It was about this time that Catherine moved into the house near the Minerva in which she died. To Neri, still at Naples, she wrote that they had taken a house near San Biagio, and that she hoped to return to Siena before Easter, if God permitted. This, however, was not to be. Early in January, 1380, the Romans revolted against Urban, and for a time it seemed as if the Holy Father's life was in danger. "The old serpent," says Raimondo, "created a division between the people of Rome and the Sovereign Pontiff, and things attained to such a pass that the Pope's life was openly threatened. When Catherine was informed of this she was deeply moved. As ever, she had recourse to prayer, and earnestly implored her Divine Spouse to prevent such a crime. She wrote me at that time a letter in which she told me that she had seen in spirit the city of Rome filled with demons who incited the people to parricide. They attacked the Saint with horrible cries, saying: 'Cursed be thou who wouldst prevent us. We will slay thee with terrible torments.' She answered naught, but continued to pray fervently . . . The Lord once answered her: 'Suffer that nation which daily blasphemeth My Name to fall into this crime; and when it is committed I will execute vengeance upon it and destroy it, for My Justice forbids me to support its iniquities any longer.'" But she prayed with still

increased fervour, reminding our Lord that from the death of Urban would result incalculable harm, not only to Rome, but to the whole Church. "Therefore let Thine anger be appeased, and despise not Thy people, for whom Thou hast given so heavy a ransom."

"This contest with God continued for several days and nights, and her feeble body had much to endure. God opposed His Justice to her prayers, and the devils continued their clamour against her. Her fervour was so great that if God, to use her own expression, had not 'encircled her members,' she must have perished. But at last, in this combat in which her body was being destroyed by protracted suffering, Catherine triumphed, and obtained her petition. When God alleged His Justice, she replied: 'Lord, since Thy Justice must be satisfied, despise not, I entreat Thee, the prayers of Thy servant. Infiict on my body the chastisement merited by this people. Yea, for the Honour of Thy Holy Name and of Thy Church I will cheerfully drain that chalice of suffering and of death. Thy Truth knows that I have ever ardently desired it, and that my soul has been continually inflamed by Thy Grace to that end.' At these words, which Catherine pronounced in the secret of her heart, the interior voice of God was no longer heard, and by this Divine Silence she understood that her prayer had prevailed. From that very moment the popular sedition began to calm down, and was at last finally appeased. But in the Saint, a most pure victim, was it expiated.

"The powers of hell had permission to torment her holy body, and exerted their rage on it with such cruelty that those who witnessed it declared to me that it would be impossible to conceive an idea of it without having witnessed it. These cruel sufferings increased daily. Her skin adhered to her bones, and her body was reduced to a skeleton. Still she walked, worked, and prayed earnestly; but to those who watched her she seemed rather a spirit than a human soul. Her tortures multiplied, and visibly consumed her body. But so far from interrupting her prayers Catherine increased their length and their fervour. Her spiritual family saw very distinctly the signs of the torments wrought upon her by hell, but no one could

apply a remedy, for this God would not permit. Moreover, though her bodily frame decayed and wasted away, her soul rose joyfully and courageously above all these trials; the more she suffered the more she prayed. I was informed by the spectators—and, indeed, she wrote to me herself—that in the midst of her martyrdom she heard the demons shriek: ‘Cursed one, thou hast always pursued us, and still continuest thy pursuit. Now our vengeance shall be satisfied. Thou designest to force us to go hence, but first we will take thy life.’ And whilst saying this they redoubled their torments. Catherine suffered thus from Sexagesima Sunday (January 29th, 1380) until the last day of April, on which she died, and her blessed spirit winged its way to Heaven.”

Barduccio Canigiani, describing the last months of her life, says that Catherine first began to suffer thus about the Feast of the Circumcision (to which solemnity, as that of the first Bloodshedding of our Divine Lord, she had always had a singular devotion). He writes: “The food necessary for her bodily sustenance excited in her such horror that it was impossible for her to swallow it. She could not, for her refreshment, even drink a single drop of water, though she was consumed with burning thirst, and her throat was so parched that she seemed to breathe fire. She continued, however, to appear as active and gay as usual, and thus attained Sexagesima. On that day, while praying at Vespers, there occurred an event so grave that from that moment she was never able to recover her wonted health.”

This “event,” which is mentioned by Fra Raimondo and described by Caffarini, was an awful and overwhelming spiritual experience so vivid and real that it affected St. Catherine’s physical state. While she was praying in St. Peter’s on Sexagesima Sunday, before the tombs of the Apostles, this daughter of St. Dominic felt the crushing weight of the Ship of the Church, the *Navicella* of St. Peter, laid upon her frail shoulders, bowing her to the ground, where she sank unconscious in a deathlike swoon. She understood it, indeed, to be the sign of her own approaching end. From this moment her final sufferings began. They were increased next day when, as Barduccio

tells us, while Catherine was dictating a letter to him, "she had so violent an access of illness that we mourned her as dead. She remained long without giving any sign of life; then she suddenly arose, and appeared as though she had undergone no change whatever. From this time began new and extraordinary bodily sufferings. When Lent began she meditated with so great devotion, notwithstanding her infirmities, that she astonished us . . . For one hour of mental prayer weakened her delicate frame more than two days of uninterrupted spiritual exercises would fatigue any other person. Every morning after Communion they were obliged to raise her from the floor and carry her to her bed as though she were dead. Yet an hour or two after she would arise, and we would go to St. Peter's, a mile distant; there she would stay until Vespers, and then return almost lifeless."

St. Catherine now deferred hearing Mass till the hour of Terce, on account of the pain in her side, and of her other sufferings. "She heard Mass daily in St. Peter's," says Raimondo; "prayed longer than formerly, and returned home at the hour of Vespers. Those who then saw her extended on her bed could not have believed her capable of rising from it. Yet on the morrow at dawn of day she got up, set out from her house in the Via del Papa, between the Minerva and the Campo de' Fiori, and walked quickly to St. Peter's—a fatiguing journey for anyone even in good health." In the fourteenth century the Basilica of St. Peter was, of course, the ancient church founded by Constantine; not the present mighty structure of Michael Angelo.

"Such were her exercises," continues Barduccio, "till the Third Sunday in Lent. She then bowed beneath the weight of the sufferings which overwhelmed her exhausted body, and the anguish that rent her soul in view of the sins which were being committed against God, and the increasingly serious dangers which threatened Holy Church. She was nothing but suffering, interior and exterior, and thus she continued for eight whole weeks, being unable even to raise her head. In the midst of this martyrdom she frequently said: 'These torments are physical, but they are not natural. God allows the devils to torture

me thus.' It was evident that what she declared was true, and that these sufferings were supernatural. It is impossible to give an idea of the patience she displayed. I will only say that at each new torment she joyfully raised her heart and her eyes to God, saying: 'Thanks be to Thee, O my Everlasting Spouse, Who dost continually honour Thine handmaid, so poor and wretched, with fresh proofs of Thy Love.'"

It was the final testing of the heroic soul, this long agony through which, with her Lord, she passed to victory. The "dark night of the soul" fell upon her, not for three hours, but for three months; while the Saint filled up with her spiritual and physical suffering for the Church and for the "Christ on earth," the measure of the sufferings of our Lord for the whole world. Into this long, mysterious period of torment no human eye may follow her agonizing spirit. In her mystic Passion she trod the winepress, she drank the cup, alone. Not one of her companions; not even the holy Friars and priests; not her "beloved son" Barduccio himself, on whom she leant when unable to stand from weakness during the first stage of her sufferings, could do more than stand aside, longing to share what they could only dimly apprehend; waiting like those who stood beneath the Cross of her Master, until the mystery should be revealed.

Of the mystic it is, above all, demanded that he should suffer. In those amazing passages in "the Ascent of Mount Carmel," in which St. John of the Cross described two centuries later the life of the contemplative, it may be remembered that the soul at first sees the path before her wind up into darkness. Her first step upon it involves the mortification of all bodily desires; her second, the relinquishing of all delights and images of God, and all ordinary consolations of heart and mind. These first steps Catherine had left far behind. For the Saint who has begun his pilgrimage to the Possession of God Himself, nothing but the End can satisfy. "He does not desire the Beauty of God, or His Love, or the sound of His Voice; still less mere symbols of His Presence; least of all His earthly gifts. He does not find God till he reaches, and passes, the 'third night' of total darkness; and there,

where none of these appear, he comes to His Beloved.”¹ So Catherine, who through the sweet gaiety and cheerfulness of her three-and-thirty years had found God Immanent ; as marvellously revealed to her eye in the beauty of a field-flower or a butterfly, as to her soul in the long, silent night-watches, and fiery ecstasies in her cell—so true is it that the mystics are the artists of the spiritual life—was now to find God Transcendent in her night of supreme desolation. Nothing was spared her—as she herself had prayed. And St. Catherine, dying mysteriously, surely, from the outward and inward assaults of the devil, maddened with rage at the escape of his prey, is as truly a martyr as St. Polycarp himself.

The letter which she was dictating to Barduccio on January 30th, the day after Sexagesima Sunday, was to Pope Urban VI, and it is believed to be the last she addressed to him. She had given him wise counsel as to his course of action regarding the envoys sent to him by the rebellious Romans—“ a people so much more easily led and bound by kindness than by force and by harsh words.” “ I humbly beg you also to be prudent, and never to promise anything unless you are truly able to perform it ”—a necessary caution in the case of Urban VI. “ Suffer me, *dolcissimo, Santissimo Babbo mio*, to say these things. I hope that your humility and goodness will accept them without anger and contempt, though they issue from the lips of so wretched a woman as I . . . Take courage ! Fear nothing ! God will provide for this, as for everything, for He is the Protector and the Master of the Ship of the Church, and of your Holiness.” And Catherine closes by begging the Pope to “ repair the ruins of Italy,” and to give his people, condescending to their human infirmity, such treatment as shall cure their ills, “ lest death overtake them.” Disappointed, wounded to the heart as she must have been by the ineffectiveness of her “ Christ on earth,” whom she now and then so vigorously takes to task for his too hasty temper, Catherine seems to have infused enough of her dauntless courage and energy into Urban to prevent him—at least during her lifetime—from wholly losing the holy desires for reform with which

¹ Monsignor R. H. Benson.

he had mounted the Throne of St. Peter. Her earthly life at least was not saddened by the after-tragedy. But she must have known, better indeed than any, how hopeless it was, humanly speaking, to look for great things from the coarse-natured, violent-tempered (and, as appeared later, insanely suspicious and vindictive) man who was yet, in virtue of his office, her "Sweet Holy Father." This, at least, may be said for Urban VI—as far as it was in him to do so, he appreciated Catherine of Siena. He believed in her, and trusted her as Gregory XI had done; but with a firmness unlike Gregory's weakness he never turned against her angrily when he was in trouble. Historians have explained his later barbarities to be the result of madness; but to Catherine he was always a steadfast friend; taking her advice gratefully, and even accepting her scoldings in good part.

St. Catherine's own story of the Sexagesima of 1380 is to be found in two of her letters to Fra Raimondo, almost incoherent with agony. "O my sweetest Father," writes the Saint, "I may not hide from you the great mysteries of God. I will relate them as briefly as I can, and as well as the feebleness of my tongue will permit. I will tell you, too, what I want you to do, but do not grieve on account of what I say, for I know not what the Divine Goodness will do with me—whether I remain here, or whether I be called away. My Father! My Father! My well-beloved son! God has done such great things from the Day of the Circumcision till now that it would be impossible to describe them. But let us leave that time and come to Sexagesima Sunday, on which day those events happened which I will describe in few words. I know not how anyone can endure such things and live. The anguish of my heart was so great that my very garment was rent. I fell down, writhing on the floor of the chapel like one in convulsions; and I should have died had anyone tried to restrain me. On Monday evening I was very anxious to write to the Christ on earth and to the Italian Cardinals. With help, I reached my cell, but when I had written to the Christ on earth I could no more, so fearful were the sufferings of my body. Shortly after this began the terrible attacks of the devils, who threw me down, furious against

me, as if I, a worm of earth, had snatched from their hands what they had long possessed in the Holy Church. And the terror which was united to my bodily sufferings was so great that I desired to leave my cell, and go to the chapel, as if my cell was the cause of my torments.

“Then I rose, and being unable to walk I leant on my son Barduccio, but immediately I was thrown down again. And lying on the ground it seemed to me that my soul had left my body ; but not as formerly, when I tasted the joys of the Blessed, and enjoyed with them the Sovereign Good. Now it seemed to me that I was a distinct and separate thing. My body did not appear to belong to me, but to another ; and my soul, on seeing the distress of [Barduccio], who was with me, desired to know if I could make use of my body to say to him : ‘ My son, fear nothing ! ’ But I saw that my tongue and my other members were incapable of anything, as if my body had been dead. Then I left the body where it was, and my intelligence fixed itself on the Abyss of the Trinity. My memory was full of the thought of the needs of Holy Church, and of all Christian people. I cried in the Presence of God, and asked His Help confidently, offering Him my desires, and doing Him violence in the Blood of the Lamb, by the pains which He had endured. With so much earnestness did I implore that it seemed as if He could not reject my request. I prayed then for all of you ; praying Him to accomplish in you His Will and my desires. Then I besought Him to deliver me from eternal damnation ; and thus I remained so long that all the family wept for me as dead.

“ By this time, the terror I had of the devils was passing away, and the humble Lamb offered Himself to my soul, saying : ‘ Be sure that I will satisfy thy desires, and those of My other servants. I will have thee see that I am a good Master. I act like the potter who unmakes and refashions the clay wherewith he forms his vessels according to his good pleasure . . . Therefore have I taken the vessel of thy body, and I remodel it in the Garden of My Holy Church. Henceforth it shall no longer be as in the past.’ And the Supreme Truth encompassed me with graces, and with ineffable words. My body began to breathe a

little, and to show that the soul had returned to it. Then I was filled with wonder, and such pain was in my heart that I feel it still. I lost then all joy, all consolation, all strength; and when they carried me to the upper chamber it seemed to me full of devils who began to attack me in a way more horrible than any I have ever experienced, since they tried to make me believe it was no longer I who inhabited my body, but an evil spirit. Then I invoked the Divine Help with extreme tenderness. I refused nothing, but I said: '*Deus, in adiutorium meum intende: Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina!* You have permitted me to be alone in this combat, without the assistance of the Father of my soul—and my ingratitude is the cause.'

“Two nights and two days passed in these tempests; but my spirit and my desire changed not. My soul was ever united with its Object, and my body seemed reduced to nothing. On the Feast of the Purification I wished to hear Mass, and then all these mysteries were renewed in me. God showed me the great danger which was threatening, as was shortly afterwards seen; for Rome was on the point of revolting; and everywhere nothing was heard but abuse, and outrageous words. But God has graciously willed to soften men's hearts, and I think that all will end happily. Also, God commanded me throughout Lent to cause Mass to be celebrated before the whole community, daily, and to offer thus all their desires for the intention of the Holy Church. Also I was to hear Mass every morning at dawn. You know that this is impossible to me, but in obeying Him all things are possible. So strong was the desire that the memory could not retain, the intelligence comprehend, or the will desire any other thing. Not only did it refuse everything here below, but in its relations with the Blessed the soul neither can nor will take delight in their happiness, but only in that hunger which they have, and had while they were still pilgrims and strangers in this life. It is in this state, and in others which I cannot describe that my life is consumed in union with the Sweet Spouse, and with the glorious martyrs who have watered the way with their blood. I pray the Divine Goodness to let me see speedily the salvation of His people.

“When it is time for Terce I have already heard Mass, and you may behold me going to St. Peter’s like one dead. There again I begin to work hard within the Ship of Holy Church, remaining till the hour of Vespers. I never want to leave that spot by day or by night, until I see the people calmer, and reconciled to their Father. My body takes no nourishment, not even a drop of water; and its sweet sufferings are so intense that never have I endured anything like them. My life hangs on a thread. I know not now what the Divine Goodness wants of me. As to that which I suffer, I do not say that I am ignorant of His Will. But as to my bodily pains it seems to me I must surely bear them by a new martyrdom in the sweetness of my soul—that is, in Holy Church. Perhaps so I shall be with Him in His Resurrection. He will put an end to my misery, and to the anguish of my desire, or He will once more build up my body by ordinary means. I have prayed and do pray His Mercy to accomplish His Will in me, and not to leave you orphans, you and the others, but to direct you always in the way of the Doctrine of Truth with a true and perfect Light. I am persuaded that He will do it.”

After this follow some very touching and beautiful instructions to Fra Raimondo to live as a perfect Religious, so that all he does may be “ruled and directed according to God”; and several messages and commissions. “I bequeath this family to you,” continues the Saint; “so that as far as possible you may always be its Pastor, its Father. Preserve it in the bonds of Charity and perfect union, that it be not dispersed like a flock of sheep having no shepherd. For my part I hope to be more useful to them after my death than during my lifetime”—writes this true and faithful daughter of St. Dominic, in whose ears the “*O Spem Miram*” was doubtless ringing.

“I pray you to ask of the Eternal Spouse that He cause me to accomplish generously His Will in all things, and pardon me the multitude of my faults. And you—I pray you, too, to forgive the disobedience, the want of respect, the grief and the sorrow I have been guilty of in your regard, as well as my lack of zeal for our salvation. I ask your blessing. Pray earnestly for me, and obtain prayers for me, for the Love of Jesus Crucified. Forgive me if I

have written anything that pains you. I have not written to afflict you, but because I am in doubt, and know not yet what the Goodness of God requires of me. I want to have fulfilled my duty. Do not grieve that we are separated from one another in body. Certainly you would have been a great comfort to me ; but I have a greater consolation, a greater joy still in seeing the fruits you are bringing forth for Holy Church ; and I implore you to work with greater zeal than ever, for never has the need been so great. Yield to no persecution without the permission of our Lord the Pope. Courage, courage, in Christ, Sweet Jesus ! Never let us be cast down."

In a letter which is a continuation of this, as if St. Catherine had been too exhausted to say all she desired in the former, she describes, in a manner which vividly recalls the Dialogue, the revelations God had made to her soul during her torments. "No one," she writes, "can understand the Beauty of God in the Abyss of the Trinity without the Sweet Spouse as intermediary, for all who would do so must pass through the Door of Jesus Crucified, and this Door is only to be found within the Holy Church. Then I saw that the Spouse gives life, for so much life has she in herself that none can weaken or obscure it. And I saw that her fruits are never lacking, but ever increasing." Following a short account of these revelations are messages to the Holy Father and to the Cardinals from God Himself, speaking by the mouth of His servant. Then Catherine continues :

"My tongue is unable to describe the mysteries which my intelligence has seen and my heart felt. I passed to-day in ecstasy, and when evening came so transported was I with love that I could not help going to the place of prayer. I understood that the moment of my death was approaching, and I prostrated myself, reproaching myself bitterly for having so negligently and ignorantly served the Spouse of Christ, and for having been the cause that others did the same. I was full of these thoughts when God placed me in His Presence—not as I am always, for He encloses all within Himself ; but in a new way, as if the memory, the intelligence, and the will had nothing more to do with the body. And I contemplated the Word

with so great a light that I beheld again in this Abyss the mysteries of Holy Church, all the graces, past and present, which I had received in my life, and the day on which God took my soul to be His Spouse. All that disappeared in the ardour of Love, which continued to increase; and I only thought what I could do to sacrifice myself to God for Holy Church, and how best to destroy the ignorance and negligence of those whom God had entrusted to me. Then the devils were let loose against me, and wished to prevent, and to diminish through terror the volume of my desire. They struck at the envelope of my body, but my desire was inflamed more and more, and I cried: 'O Eternal God! receive the sacrifice of my life, in the Mystical Body of Holy Church! I have nothing to give You but that which You have given me Yourself. Take my heart, and press it out upon the Face of the Spouse!'

"Then the Eternal, looking on me with Mercy, took my heart and wrung it out upon the Holy Church. With such violence did He take it that had He not granted me strength to prevent the vessel of my body from breaking, I should have died. The devils cried out with even greater fury, as if they had themselves endured an insupportable pang. They used all their efforts to terrify me, threatening to find some way to render all that I did useless and valueless; but Humility triumphed over hell in the Light of the Most Holy Faith. The more they strove the more earnestly I supplicated, and I heard, in the Presence of the Divine Majesty, words so sweet and promises so tender that my soul was inundated with joy. So mysterious was my state that no words can explain it.

"And now I say, 'Thanks, thanks be rendered to the Most High, the Eternal, Who has placed us on the field of battle to fight like valiant knights for His Spouse, with the shield of the most Holy Faith.' Victory is ours, by that power which has vanquished the devil, enemy of the human race. He has been vanquished not by virtue of our humanity, but by virtue of the Divinity. Yes! the devil is conquered, and will be conquered, not by the sufferings of our bodies, but by the Fire of Divine and Ineffable Charity."

(2)

FOR more than fifteen months Catherine had yearned after her beloved "son" Stefano. If his own mother's unwillingness to part with him increased the difficulty of his leaving Siena, not only was the feeling unworthy of Madonna Giovanna Maconi, but her desire to keep her son at home was not destined to be gratified. For Stefano, when eventually he did leave Siena to rejoin his spiritual family after Easter, 1380, never returned to live at home. As soon as possible after St. Catherine's death he entered the Carthusian Order, according to her dying wish. For months, although she had never actually summoned him to her, little expressions of her longing to see once more his beloved face had slipped into her letters. "Stefano, you do not come!" she writes on January 1st, 1379. And in the same letter: "Apply yourself with zeal to the task of leaving the world, and run towards God, who holds out His Arms to you. O, come quickly!" But more than a year had passed, and Stefano had not come. From his own letters we gather that just now he was in a curiously unsettled state. The world was very sweet to the young noble, rich, brilliant, and attractive as he was; and though he kept closely in touch with the members of Catherine's Little Company still left in Siena, the Mother and Mistress herself was absent. Deprived of her presence and holy influence, Stefano seems to have been really undecided as to his true vocation. He was, however, deeply in earnest in desiring that God's Will should be done in him—the expression occurs again and again in his letters—and he remitted none of his regular exercises of piety, either of good works or of prayer. His devotion to his spiritual Mother had been, if possible, greatly increased by the fact that a year or two previously, when he had been taken prisoner by brigands in the Sienese *contado* he had been miraculously released by calling on Catherine's name—a fact to which the Saint alludes in one of her letters to him. He had, of course, been in constant correspondence with her, but he does not seem to have fully opened his

heart as to his religious vocation. On this point St. Catherine had supernatural insight. Her last letter to him, dictated probably during Lent, 1380, is full of bracing spiritual counsel. "As for the indulgences I had promised to obtain for thee," she says, "thou must not expect them, nor anything else, if thou canst not come for them thyself. I do not say I will refuse to help thee in thy spiritual needs, for never have I desired to do so more than now; and to instruct thee according to the knowledge that God shall put in my soul. Never have I offered thee in His Sweet Presence with greater fervour, for I can see that never hast thou needed it more. Thou sayest that thy state displeases thee. When it displeases thee indeed, I shall know it, for thou wilt abandon it immediately. Then thou wilt show that thou knowest thy state; but at the present time it seems to me that thou dost not."

Then, as if the Saint had been suddenly interrupted, follow a few incoherent lines, and she continues: "I have received a letter from the Abbot [of the Olivetan Benedictines of Siena]. He speaks to me of the flowers he has planted in his garden and mine. He hopes to plant others, among whom will be thyself and thy companions. Thou hast, it seems, already decided upon this step. It is certainly a great joy for me to behold thee leaving thine imperfections, and advancing towards perfection; but I am very much surprised that thou shouldst actually pledge thyself without telling us anything about it. There is some mystery here. I pray the Eternal Goodness to do what is best for His Honour and thy salvation."

After all, the Abbot was wrong in his announcement—probably interpreting Stefano's wishes by his own. For the young man, as he tells us himself, had no thought at that time of joining any Order, and the mistake was soon explained. But Catherine's heart was still too human not to have felt deeply this subtle wound; and her desire for Stefano's presence seems to have increased with her sufferings. This was doubtless as much on his own account as hers, though Stefano was the sunshine of the Little Company. She had—so she told him in one of her letters—a "word from God" to say to him, and she did not

wish to die until that word was spoken. He, on the other hand, had evidently no idea of the gravity of Catherine's state. But this he was soon to learn.

During Holy Week, 1389, Fra Bartolommeo Domenico, now Prior of San Domenico at Siena, came to Rome on business of the Order, arriving in the Eternal City on Holy Saturday, March 24th, the eve of the very day on which Catherine completed her thirty-third year: "I hastened to her residence," he tells us, "being at that time entirely ignorant of her state. I found her extended on planks, surrounded on every side by other planks, so that she seemed to be in a coffin. I approached her, in the hope of being able to converse with her as usual. Her body was so emaciated that her bones could easily be counted; it appeared as though dried in the sun, and no longer presented any appearance of beauty. This sight broke my heart, and I said to her through my tears: 'Mother, how do you find yourself?' When she beheld me she was anxious to testify her joy, but could not speak. I was obliged to place my ear close to her mouth to catch her reply that all was well with her, through the merits of Christ our Saviour. I then disclosed to her the object of my journey, and added: 'Mother, to-morrow will be Easter Day, and I should like to celebrate Mass here, so as to give Holy Communion to you and to your spiritual children.' She answered: 'O, if only our Sweet Saviour would permit me to receive Him!'

"I left her, and on the following day I returned to fulfil my promise. I approached her to hear her confession and give her absolution. No one believed she would be able to receive Holy Communion, for during several days she had been incapable of making any movement. However, I gave her for penance to ask of God, for her consolation and ours, the grace of communicating on so great a Festival; and then I went to the altar, which was close to the place where she lay. I . . . commenced Mass. Catherine remained motionless until the Holy Communion. As soon as I had terminated, and received the ablutions, she arose suddenly, to the great astonishment of all present, who shed tears of joy. She advanced unassisted as far as the altar, knelt down with her eyes closed,

her hands clasped, and remained there till she had received the Consecrated Host and the wine of ablution it was customary to present . . . She afterwards fell into ecstasy, and when she came forth from it she found it impossible to return to her bed. Her companions carried her there, and she remained perfectly motionless as before. God permitted her, however, to converse with me during the few days that I remained in Rome ; and it was then she explained to me the incredible pains and sufferings that the demons forced her to undergo. She prayed with unabated ardour for the Peace of the Church ; she desired and asked of God to expiate in her person the sins of those who separated the faithful from the real Sovereign Pontiff, Urban VI. ‘ Rest assured,’ she said, ‘ that if I die the sole cause of my death is the zeal which burns and consumes me for the Holy Church. I suffer gladly for her deliverance, and am ready to die for her if it be necessary.’

“ The business which had brought me to Rome was finished, and my companion urged me to return. I steadily refused, and this I told Catherine. She said I must go back . . . ‘ Mother,’ I said, ‘ how can we go and leave you in such an extremity ? Had I learnt of your condition, being absent from you, I should have left all, and hastened to your side. Indeed I cannot resolve to depart without seeing you convalescent, or having at least some reason to hope for your recovery.’ Then Catherine said : ‘ My son, well do you know the consolation it gives me to behold those whom God has given to me, and whom I love in the Truth. It would be the greatest happiness to me if Fra Raimondo could be here, as well as yourself. But it is God’s Will that I should be deprived of you both, and as I desire His Will, not mine own, you must depart. Know that very soon a Chapter of the Order will be held at Bologna for the election of a Master-General. Fra Raimondo will be nominated. I wish you to be there with him, and always to be obedient to him. This I command you, as far as I have power.’

“ I told her I would do whatever she commanded me as soon as I saw her better in health, and added : ‘ If it is God’s Will that I go, ask Him to give you health before my departure.’ She promised me to do so, and when I

returned there on the following day I found her so calm and contented that I approached her full of hope. But she, who had hitherto been unable to move, extended her arms to me, and embraced me so affectionately that I could not refrain from shedding tears of joy. This embrace was to make known to me God's Will, and to exhort me to depart. *Seduxisti me, Domine, et seductus : fortior me fuisti, et invaluisti.* 'The Lord deceived me,' as saith the Prophet.

"I left Rome. A short time after I returned to Siena a letter informed me that Blessed Catherine had passed from this life to be united to the Spouse she so much desired."

Catherine lived for a month after her old friend's departure, and it was probably during these weeks that Messer Tommaso Petra, who had been Papal secretary at Avignon, and for whom the Saint had a deep respect and affection, found her one day in a garden, whither her friends had carried her to enjoy the spring sunshine and flowers which she so dearly loved. After greeting her tenderly the old man, whom she called "Father," asked Catherine if she had made her dispositions for death, "since it appears to me, my dear Mother, that Christ your Spouse will not leave you long in this life, for He wishes to unite you to Himself." She asked him what disposition was possible for a poor woman who possessed nothing? Then he assured her that her best testament would be to indicate to each of her disciples what he ought to do after her death. "'I request it of you, for the Love of God; and I am convinced that all will obey you as myself.' She answered: 'I am very willing, and with God's grace I will do so.' She did so, very shortly after, and all her recommendations were followed. I added: 'Mother, I have another favour to ask of you, and I beseech you to grant it to me for the Love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Obtain from your Divine Spouse the grace of showing me the state of your soul after your death.' 'That,' she said to me, 'does not appear possible, for either in the other life the soul is saved, and then the perfect happiness which it enjoys leads it to forget the miseries of this world; or it is lost, and then the infinite

torments it endures prevent it from obtaining any favour. If it be in Purgatory it must participate in the two states, and the difficulty remains the same.' I said: 'I am unwilling to dispute with the Holy Ghost, and I do not believe that in such a case you would attempt to limit His Power. I trust in God that you will not refuse me my request.' She promised me to grant it if our Lord would permit it. Very shortly afterwards she died."

The account given of Catherine's state by Fra Bartolommeo on his return to Siena set Stefano's warm heart on fire with longing to be at his beloved Mother's side before it was too late. It was while he was praying one night with the Brethren of the Confraternity of La Scala that he heard an interior voice warning him to hasten to Rome if he would see Catherine alive. The Brethren urged him to start at once, and he arrived probably about the beginning of April. His agony in beholding the awful change wrought in his friend can be imagined, but not described. At once he stepped into his old place; becoming once more, literally, Catherine's right hand, and writing for her the few letters she was still able to dictate—notably one to Fra Bartolommeo, in which the Saint bade a last farewell to that tried and trusted friend.

We shall take the account of the last days of St. Catherine entirely from the words of those who were present, some of whom wrote their own pathetic versions of the triumph of her passing, while seven gave their evidence to Fra Raimondo, who incorporated the stories into his beautiful *Legenda*. He was still at Genoa when, as he says: "Catherine the Blessed concluded her pilgrimage, and crowned it by an admirable martyrdom. Therefore . . . I can no longer describe events as a personal witness, but all that I shall commit to writing I know . . . from persons who assisted her in her last moments, and who witnessed the marvels which the Almighty effected by the intercession of His Servant." Raimondo mentions these witnesses in order, with a short notice of each, "that others may credit them more thoroughly than they do myself; since they are assuredly more worthy, for they imitated Catherine's example better than I; and consequently comprehended it more clearly." The witnesses

are: Alessia, "who appears to me to be entitled to the highest rank among Catherine's disciples, not by her seniority, but by the perfection of her virtues"; Cecca (Francesca Gori of Siena), whose three sons had been Dominican Friars; Lisa, "of whom I know that she always spoke the truth"; Fra Santi, Barduccio Canigiani, Stefano Maconi, and Neri di Landoccio, who was "longer than any other a witness of the admirable actions of Catherine." Neri was not present during Catherine's last days on earth, but Fra Raimondo is referring to the whole period of his own absence from Rome, since December, 1378. He now continues:

"The Blessed Catherine, seeing that her last hour was approaching, summoned around her her disciples, and such as the Lord had made members of her household, and addressed to them first a general discourse, exhorting all to advance in the path of perfection . . . The first and fundamental obligation which she laid down was this: He who gives himself to God, if he desires to possess Him in return, must divest his heart of all sensible love, not only towards persons, but all creatures, in order to tend to God, his Creator, in entire simplicity and sincerity of soul, for . . . the heart cannot give itself to God if it be not disentangled and freed from every bond. A soul cannot give itself to God without prayer, founded on humility, which acknowledges itself nothing, and is devoid of all personal confidence. Generous application to mental prayer is also necessary, because it increases and fortifies virtues which, without that sustenance, would become weak, and disappear. She taught all her followers to give stated hours to vocal prayer; and to give themselves continually to mental prayer, either by acts, or in the heart.

"She said besides, that by the aid of strong Faith she saw and perfectly understood in her mind that whatever happened to herself or to others came from God, and proceeded from His immense Love to His Creatures. And that this excited and developed within her a love for, and a promptitude in obeying, the orders of God and her superiors, believing always that these orders came from God Himself, either for the necessities of salvation or for

the increase of virtues in her soul. She declared that in order to acquire purity of mind it was necessary for man to beware of judging his neighbour unfavourably, and to abstain from all idle criticism of his conduct; for in all creatures we must behold the Will of God. She particularly recommended that no one should be despised or condemned under the form of judgment, even though such a one is seen to be in fault. If the evil in him be evident, we should take compassion on him, and pray for him without despising or condemning him. She ever entertained a strong confidence in Divine Providence, because she knew by experience how graciously the Almighty extends His bounty over all His works. Catherine and all her followers had always experienced that God provided for all their necessities. She added that those who trusted in Divine Providence should not only never be abandoned, but should experience special help.

“The Blessed Catherine also gave her followers other counsels: then she ended by the last recommendation of our Lord to His disciples, begging them humbly and earnestly to love one another. By their mutual affection they would prove themselves her spiritual children, and she would consider herself their Mother, and they would prove her glory and her crown. Moreover, she would intercede with the Divine Goodness on their behalf, that He would bless them as generously as He had blessed herself. She commanded them in the name of Charity to offer up continual and fervent prayers for the reformation and prosperity of the Holy Church, and of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. These had been her ever-present thoughts during seven years; and to obtain an answer to her prayers she had constantly endured in her body very great pains and infirmities, especially latterly. She added that as Satan had obtained from God permission to overwhelm Job with every variety of ill, it seemed to her that hell had also obtained permission to afflict and vex her body by every species of torment; so that from head to foot it appeared that there was ‘no health in her.’ She concluded thus: ‘My dear friends, it is evident to me that my beloved Spouse has disposed and designed all, so that after the trials that His Goodness has deigned to grant me,

according to my heart's earnest desire, my soul shall be liberated from its prison, and return to its true Source."

"The witnesses whom I have cited have written that the anguish and deep distress of Catherine appeared so terrible that no one could have supported them without the Grace of God ; but she endured them calmly, without any sign of sadness. As they were full of sorrow, weeping at beholding her in that condition, she said to them : ' Beloved sons, you should not thus be afflicted at my death ; you should rather rejoice with me and congratulate me because I am about to quit this land of exile, and rest for ever in the Eternal Peace of God. I tell you positively that I shall be more useful to you after my death than I should, or could, by remaining with you in this grievous, miserable life. Nevertheless, I commend my existence, its termination, and my whole being into the Hands of my Divine and Ever-Blessed Spouse ; and if He perceive that I can yet be useful to any living creature, if He will that I yet remain amid anguish and torture, I am ready for the Honour of His Name and the salvation of my neighbour to suffer a hundred times a day, if possible, death itself and all other imaginable torments. But if it be agreeable to Him that I depart, be certain, dear children, that I have given my life for the Church : I have a certain knowledge that God has permitted it by a particular Grace.'

"After that, she called her disciples one after another, and prescribed to each one the kind of life he ought to embrace after her death. She desired that all should submit to my direction, as the one who held her place ; and she indicated to some the Religious, to others the Solitary Life. For the women, and particularly the Sisters of Penance, she designated Alessia as Superior. She regulated all, according to the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost. Events proved that it was thus, for her directions proved beneficial to everyone."

"In her last moments," writes Stefano, "she told each one of us what we ought to do after her death. Then she turned to me, and pointing me out with her finger, said : ' As for you, I command you on the part of Almighty God, and in the name of Holy Obedience, to enter the Order of

the Carthusians, because God wills it, and calls you to it.' ” This was the “ Word from God ” which had been in Catherine’s heart to say to him. It became her last farewell to her “ dearest son,” and his subsequent history proves how faithfully he observed God’s Will, and hers. And speaking of her promise to be more helpful after her death to her children than was possible during her life, poor Stefano writes : “ That promise she kept, and never ceases to observe it daily.”

“ After that,” continues Raimondo, “ she asked pardon of all. ‘ My beloved,’ she said, ‘ I have hungered and thirsted for your salvation ! I dare not say otherwise. Nevertheless, I have been wanting to you in many things. Not only have I not given you an example of good works and of virtue as I might have done, and should have done had I been a true Spouse of our Lord, and a perfect Religious, but also I have not been as attentive and zealous as regards your temporal wants as I might have been. I therefore implore of you all, in general and in particular, pardon and indulgence. And I entreat you, and beg you humbly and earnestly to pursue the path of virtue to the end, that you may be, as I have foretold you, my Joy and Crown.’ ”

“ After these words she kept silence. Then she made, as she did daily, her general confession, and humbly asked for Holy Communion and for the Last Sacraments.” Other details follow, which are given more fully by Barduccio, but before passing to his narrative a very beautiful page of the *Legenda* must be quoted :

“ Those who related to me the events that then took place,” writes Raimondo, “ remarked one thing especially, and I believe it happened for the greater Glory of God. After listening in silence to what seemed an accusation, Catherine replied with a joyful countenance : ‘ No, never from vainglory, but for the true Honour and Glory of God ! ’ The Divine Providence doubtless had a motive in permitting these words to be heard, for several persons, on account of the meekness of her charity and the abundant graces that were granted to her, believed that she sought, or at least enjoyed, praise, and that on this account she delighted in appearing in public. Some thus said

when speaking of her : ' Why run to hear her ? She is only a woman, and ought to remain in her cell if she desires to serve God.' These reproaches were completely answered by Catherine's words . . . that it was not vain-glory that induced her to go about and perform good works, but continual desire for the Glory of God and the Honour of His Name. I likewise can give testimony with certitude . . . that she always obeyed the direct order of God and His inspiration. Not only did she not seek praise, but she did not think of men except when she was praying for their salvation and labouring to promote it. One who had not been a witness of her life could never know to what a degree she was a stranger to all those human passions which are usual even in those consecrated to Religion. To her may be applied the words of the Apostle : '*Nostra autem conversatio in coelis est.*' "

"The night that preceded the Sunday before Ascension," testifies Barduccio Canigiani, "she passed through a severe crisis two hours before the dawn ; and we believed that her last moments had come. She then called all her family around her, and gave those who were nearest her to understand by signs that she was desirous of receiving the Absolution [*de culpâ et de poenâ* ; necessary for receiving the Papal Indulgence. This was given to her by Fra Giovanni Tantucci]. She gradually fell into a state in which there was no sign of life but a gentle breathing. It was therefore deemed expedient to give her Extreme Unction, and the Abbot of Sant' Antimo hastened to administer it to her, because she seemed to be already unconscious. This Sacrament accomplished a certain change in her : it seemed by the motion of her countenance and of her arms that she was sustaining assaults from Satan. This combat lasted an hour and a half. After a long silence she began saying : '*Peccavi, Domine, miserere mei.*' I think that she repeated these words more than sixty times, and every time she raised her right hand, and let it fall, striking the bed. She also said frequently, but without moving her arm : '*Sancti Dei, miserere mei.*' She added other words expressive of her humility and devotion, and made acts of the different virtues. After this her countenance changed, and became radiant like that of a

seraph. Her eyes, dimmed with tears, became lit up with joy. She seemed to come forth from a profound abyss, and that sight lightened the heavy burden of grief that weighed upon us.

“Catherine was then reclining on the shoulder of Monna Alessia. She tried to raise herself, and with a little help was able to sit up, still supported by Alessia. We had placed a little table before her, on which were pictures of Saints, and a case of relics [given to her by a Cardinal at Avignon]. But she fastened her gaze upon the Crucifix which was in the centre, expressing sublime thoughts concerning the Goodness of God. Then she accused herself before Him of all her sins. ‘Yes, it is my fault,’ she said, ‘my fault, O Eternal Trinity, if I have so miserably offended Thee by my negligence, my ignorance, my ingratitude, and my disobedience. Wretch that I am! I have not observed the general and particular commandments which Thy Bounty has given me! Thou didst tell me to seek Thee in all things, and to labour continually for Thine Honour and my neighbour’s good; and I have avoided even necessary fatigue! Didst Thou not command me, O God, to set no value on myself, but to think only of the Glory of Thy Name, by saving souls, and finding my delight in the nourishment which flows from Thy Sacred Cross, and I have sought my own consolation! Thou didst continually invite me to unite myself to Thee by the ardour of desire, the humility of tears, and by perseverance in prayer for the salvation of the world and the reform of the Church. Thou didst promise me to accord Thy Mercy to men, and new treasures to Thy Spouse, and I, miserable as I am, did not obey Thy wishes, but slept in my negligence! Alas! Thou didst confide souls to me; Thou didst give me children that I was bound to love in a special way, and to lead toward Thee in the Way of Life. But I have been weak in their regard; I have failed to consider their interests; I have not succoured them by praying for them humbly and continuously; I have neglected giving them a good example and helpful advice. With how little respect have I received the innumerable graces and treasures of pain and suffering that it has pleased Thee to grant me! I

did not accept them with that insatiable desire, with that burning love with which Thou didst send them to me. Alas ! my Love ! Thy infinite Goodness chose me for Thy Spouse in my early infancy, but I have not been faithful enough to Thee, for my memory has not always been full of Thee and Thy immense benefits ; my understanding has not been solely attached to comprehending them ; and my will has not been devoted to loving Thee with all my soul and with all my strength.'

" In this manner that pure dove accused herself of her faults ; then turning towards the priest, she said to him : ' For the Love of Jesus Crucified, remit me the sins of which I have accused myself, as well as all those which I cannot recall.' She then asked for the Plenary Indulgence [*in articulo mortis*] which had been granted to her by Gregory XI and by Urban VI, and in requesting it she seemed like one starving for the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her petitions were granted. She then began her adoration anew, and with such fervour, and uttering such sublime things as my sinfulness rendered me wholly unfit to comprehend. The grief which inundated my soul likewise hindered me from hearing her, for her voice was very feeble, and her sufferings were so acute that she had great difficulty in pronouncing her words. She afterwards addressed some of her spiritual children who were not present at the admirable discourse she had given several days previously to her assembled family ; pointing out the way of perfection, and indicating to each one what he should do after her death. When she had finished she asked pardon of us again for the little care she had taken of our salvation, and afterwards addressed a few words to Lucio, to another, and to my miserable self ; after which she resumed her prayers.

" O ! had you but seen with what humility and what respect she asked repeatedly the benediction of her aged mother, who was plunged into the deepest affliction ! It was impossible to restrain one's tears when one beheld that loving mother recommend herself to her blessed daughter, imploring her to obtain for her the grace not to offend God by her grief ! But nothing could distract that holy soul from the depths of her fervent prayer, and as death

came nearer, the more earnestly did she offer her life in sacrifice. She also prayed for Pope Urban VI, whom she declared to be the true Sovereign Pontiff ; and exhorted all her children to die, if necessary, in order to acknowledge him. She also offered prayer for those whom the Lord had given her to love in a special manner ; borrowing from our Lord the words He used when He commended His



disciples to His Father. She spoke with such devout tenderness that we thought our hearts would break.

“ Finally she made the sign of the Cross, blessing us all, and hailed that supreme moment of her life which she had so much desired with these words : ‘ Yea, Lord, Thou callest me, and I go to Thee ! I go, not on account of my merits, but of Thy Mercy ; and I implore that Mercy in the Name of Thy Most Precious Blood ! ’ She murmured several times : ‘ O Blood ! O Sweet, Precious Blood ! ’ And then, like our Saviour, she said : ‘ Father, into Thy

Hands I commend my spirit !' Her face was like that of an Angel as she meekly bowed her head and expired." It was Sunday, April 29th, 1380, the Feast of St. Peter, Martyr.

Her death took place at the hour of Sext, says Barduccio ; at the hour of Terce, says Fra Raimondo, who had been perpetually in Catherine's thoughts during these last solemn hours, and of whom she was now to take a mysterious farewell. "Apply to Fra Raimondo" had been one of the last, and oft-repeated counsels she gave her children, "in all your doubts and difficulties. Tell him never to become remiss, and to have no fear whatever may befall him. I will be with him continually and will protect him in all his dangers ; when he does wrong I will warn him, that so he may correct himself." "These words," says Raimondo, "she pronounced as long as she had strength to do so."

But Catherine did more than send the "Father of her soul" a message. "At the instant of her death I was in Genoa," says Raimondo, "and her soul communicated to mine, in some way, that which I have already recounted . . . but then my darkened understanding did not comprehend whence the words came, though I understood them perfectly. I was at the time fulfilling at Genoa my office of Provincial. It was the moment at which the Chapter was about to be held at Bologna for the election of a Master-General, and I was making arrangements to set out with some Religious. We were to go by sea as far as Pisa, and thence by land to Bologna, which indeed we did. We had hired a vessel and were awaiting a fair wind.

"The same morning on which Blessed Catherine died I had gone to the church to celebrate the Festival of St. Peter, Martyr. After saying Mass I went up again to the dormitory to prepare my little bundle for the journey ; when passing before an image of the Blessed Virgin I said in an undertone the *Ave Maria*, according to the custom of the Religious, and I remained kneeling there for a few moments. Then I heard a voice, which was not in the air, and which pronounced words which I heard inwardly in my mind, but not with my ears, outwardly ; and nevertheless I perceived them more distinctly than if they had

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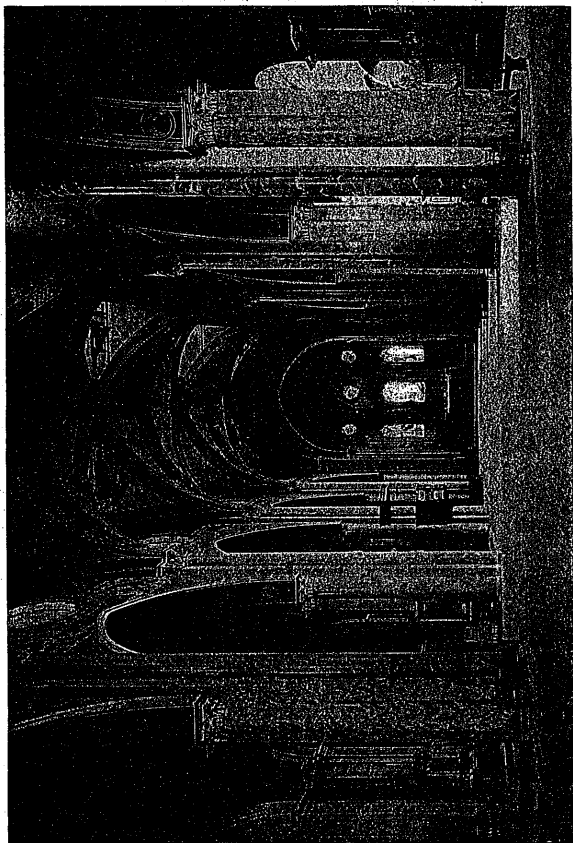


Photo. Alinari.

INTERIOR OF THE SANTA MARIA SOPRA MINERVA, ROME

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At first Fra Raimondo believed that our Lady herself had spoken to him—or would have believed it if, in his humility he had dared to do so, because of his "unworthiness." He imagined that the warning was sent to announce some terrible calamity, and encourage him to bear it. He thought of the Crusade he had just finished preaching at Genoa, against the Schismatics, and imagined that one of them intended to do him an injury. He thought at first of almost every possible contingency but that of Catherine's death. But at last the true meaning of those words spoken interiorly came home to him; at last he recognized the speaker; and so, at last, Fra Raimondo understood. And we may be very sure that, with those who were at that moment kneeling around Catherine's lifeless body in the Via del Papa in Rome, he wept.

(3)

IT was Stefano who carried the body of his beloved Mother to the Church of the Minerva hard by, where during two days it was visited and venerated by the entire population of Rome. Mediæval devotion went to lengths incomprehensible and revolting to us in the twentieth century. It may be remembered that the body of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, for example, was mutilated after her death by eager devotees anxious to secure a single wonder-working relic; and that the mortal remains of St. Antony of Padua would have shared a like fate but for the stern guard kept over them by his Religious brethren. "As soon as Catherine's lifeless body was borne to the church," says Fra Raimondo, "the whole city of Rome became aware of it; and a multitude collected from every side. They rushed forward in turbulent waves to touch

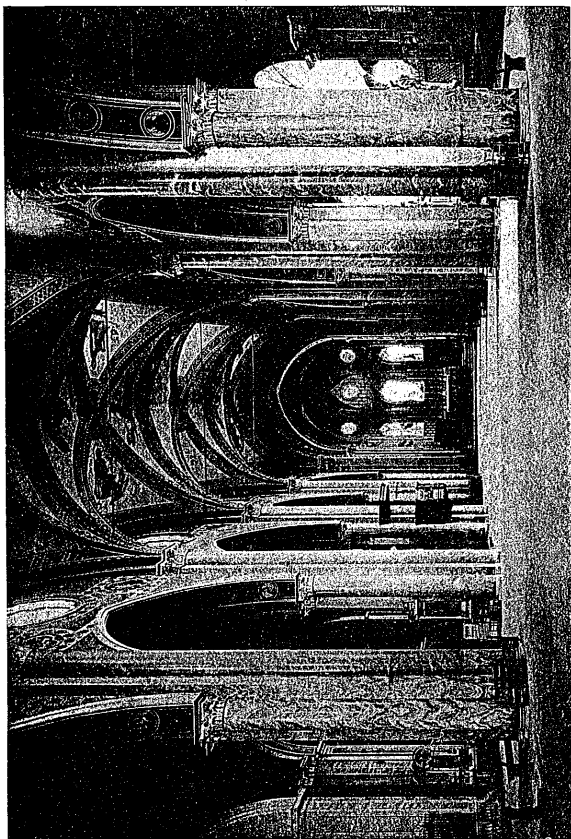


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her garments and her feet. Her spiritual sons and daughters feared lest her body should be divided in pieces upon the spot ; and thus they placed it behind the iron *grille* of the Chapel of San Domenico . . . All were desirous of venerating her remains, and of recommending themselves to her prayers. Many persons brought their sick to be cured by the intercession of Catherine ; and God did not suffer them to be disappointed of their hope."

Raimondo then relates in detail no less than eight miracles, from among a countless number, which took place before St. Catherine's burial, all of which were described to him by eye-witnesses. One of these, in spite of its length, we cannot refrain from quoting. Its subject, Madonna Semia, was a Roman lady "to whose recital I do not lightly give credit," says Fra Raimondo, "having been acquainted with her conscience and her life for more than twenty years." Semia, the mother of two sons, had for many years consecrated herself wholly to God's service, rising at night to hear Matins and Lauds, and dividing the day between her household tasks and her practices of devotion. When St. Catherine arrived in Rome, Semia visited her, was strongly attracted by her, and but for the necessity of making a home for her sons would have become one of the Saint's household. She did not, however, realize the critical state of Catherine's health, doubtless owing to the Saint's energy and cheerfulness.

"In the night preceding the morning of Catherine's death," says Raimondo, "Semia arose to pray as usual. Her prayer being concluded she reflected that as it was Sunday she ought to rise earlier than usual in order to attend High Mass, and have time to prepare her children's morning meal." She therefore lay down, intending to sleep lightly for a little while, and then get up. But while half-asleep, and saying to herself : "I must get up, or I shall be late for Mass!" she saw a wonderful vision. Child-angels revealed to her the soul of Catherine in the form of a young girl, "very magnificently and richly adorned. Her jewelled robe was of dazzling whiteness. On her head she wore three crowns, so arranged that each was distinctly visible. The lowest was of silver ; the second of mingled silver and gold ; the upper of gold richly jewelled."

At first Semia did not recognize this dazzling apparition, but Catherine came to her "as if flying," and revealed herself. Then, as Semia watched, awe-struck, she beheld Catherine raised by angels to the Throne of God; welcomed to Heaven by her Divine Spouse; and by Him presented to His Holy Mother and to a number of other Saints, whom Semia recognized by their emblems: St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Agnes, St. Margaret—each of whom she invoked aloud as she beheld them. Catherine was received by them in triumph, and in their presence crowned with glory. *Adducentur Regi virgines post eam: proximæ ejus afferentur tibi.*

When Semia awoke it was already the hour of Terce. She was late for High Mass, and had, moreover, all the preparations to make for her children's meal; but her heart was strangely disturbed, for she marvelled what this dream could mean? She knew Catherine had been for some time ill, but could not bring herself to believe she was really dead. She made her fire, and placed the pot, in which she had prepared a hasty meal, upon it, saying to herself: "If I lose Mass it will be a proof that this vision was from Satan; but if I am in time I shall believe I owe it to my Mother Catherine." When she reached the church the Offertory was being sung, and Semia was filled with grief. Returning home she finished her housework as quickly as possible, intending to hear a late Mass. While thus engaged she "heard the bell that announced Mass at a neighbouring convent of nuns. Joyfully she hastened there, leaving the vegetables as she had prepared them, and without putting them into the pot. She locked the door, leaving no one in the house, found Mass just beginning, and said to herself with delight: 'Satan did not deceive me as I fancied.'"

Still Semia could not help dreading the annoyance of her sons who would come in hungry, and find their dinner unprepared when they reached home. After hearing High Mass she hurried back, meeting one of her sons, who begged her to hasten the meal, as it was already late. She replied: "Dear children, wait but a little and all will be ready." Then she ran home, finding the door locked as

she had left it ; but when she entered the room she found the dinner was not only prepared, but served ! Nothing remained but to eat it. She was filled with amazement, and determined to go and see Catherine as soon as the meal was over, and describe all that had happened. Her sons enjoyed their dinner more than usual, but were quite unaware of what had happened. Their mother could only give thanks in her heart to Catherine.

When, during the afternoon, Semia reached Catherine's house, nobody answered her knock ; for the stricken family within were hiding the fact of their Mother's death as long as possible, fearing the consequences of betraying it to the people. The neighbours told her that the Saint had not yet returned from visiting the churches, and Semia very reluctantly went home. She happened, however, to enter the Minerva a day or two later, shortly after St. Catherine's body had been placed in St. Dominic's Chapel ; and seeing the church full of a surging and excited crowd, asked what was the matter ? When she heard the truth she managed to make her way to the chapel, and finding there Catherine's spiritual daughters she reproached them with tears for not having sent for her to assist at the Saint's last moments. She inquired when Catherine died, and one of the weeping Sisters replied : " Yesterday, at the hour of Terce." Then Semia, too, understood, and knew that God had sent His Angels " to show her the death of her Mother Catherine."

Perhaps among all the miracles attributed to St. Catherine's intercession there is none more touching than this homelike act of charity towards a busy mother ! Semia probably knew nothing of the days in Siena some twenty years earlier, when Catherine had cooked the meals she was herself unable to eat, for Giacomo Benincasa's large household ; when she became for a time the harshly-treated general servant of the family. Of many, if not most, of the Saints, are the same strange and beautiful apparitions to friends recorded, at the moment of their death. " I have left my little ass at Padua, and I go in haste to mine own country ! " said St. Antony to the Abbot of Vercelli. Several of Catherine's friends thus

received supernatural intimations of her death ; among them Fra Giovanni dalle Celle, and Messer Tommaso Petra, who it will be remembered, had asked Catherine to show him the state of her soul after she had passed into Life. In these visitations—though the last-named especially was mysterious—there is nothing unusual. But St. Catherine, at the very moment of her reception into Glory, surrounded by Saints and Martyrs, in the Presence of the Eternal Trinity, of her Divine Spouse, of His Blessed Mother, secure in the bliss of the Beatific Vision, thinks of Semia—of the friend who would perhaps feel a little slighted at receiving no notice of her “Mother’s” dangerous illness ; of the busy mother of two growing sons ; of the woman who gave up her days and nights to labour and to prayer—and not only comforted her soul by the vision of her own radiant happiness, but cooked and served the dinner which the overworked housewife had been compelled to neglect, in order to hear Mass. If anything was necessary to prove to her friends that Catherine’s love for them would now be more efficacious, more practical, than ever, it must have been the thought of this work-a-day miracle ! For they understood now that no tiniest detail of daily life, in the dullest round of menial labour, was unknown to the sweet friend who had passed beyond the Veil. They mourned and wept over her lifeless body in the Minerva, watching the successive miracles of healing with awed and thankful hearts. But they mourned not as those who have no hope, for they knew that Catherine was alive, and with them, now and evermore.

A week after her death, “a man of exalted piety,” a friend of Messer Tommaso Petra, knocked, the latter tells us, at his door. “Catherine of Siena is coming,” he said, when Petra opened it. “How can she come, since she has been dead some time ?” replied the good man ; but his friend, turning to depart, only answered : “Be sure that you will see her !” For nearly thirty days these warnings continued, given apparently by many different friends, until Petra began to feel sure the form of these friends had been assumed by angels, who came to bring him good tidings. “At last, one Sunday,” he tells us, “after having recited

my midnight Office, I prepared to take my rest, when towards dawn I saw in a cloudless sky a multitude of the Blessed who advanced in procession, three by three. They were clothed in white robes, and bore emblems, relics, crosses, lighted tapers, and instruments of music; and they sang *Kyrie Eleison, Gloria in Excelsis, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Te Deum*; one choir answering another."

Then Messer Tommaso, overcome by this great sight, remembered the promise that Catherine had made him "if it were the Will of God." "I took courage, and said to an Angel: 'What are you doing?' He replied: 'We are conducting the soul of Catherine of Siena to the Presence of the Divine Majesty!'" The procession moved on, and Petra asked another Angel: "Where is she?" Then the heavenly choir formed a circle "in the centre of which was Catherine. She was clad like the Angels, and resembled the pictures of our Saviour, which we see in churches. Her hands were filled with palm-branches, her eyes cast down. I recognized her perfectly. Then I asked Almighty God to complete the Vision, and to comfort my soul by allowing me once more to gaze upon her countenance. He heard me, for she raised her head, and looked at me with that sweet and gracious smile which had always expressed the joy of her soul." *Intra in gaudium Domini tui.*

Stefano had remained in prayer by Catherine's body so long as it was exposed in the Minerva, guarding it from the intrusive hands of the over-devout. Finally he buried it himself, "covering it with kisses and tears." It appeared, says Barduccio, as though she had only just passed away, for all the limbs were fresh and flexible. Neri arrived from Naples in time for the funeral—the Andrew of St. Catherine's disciples—the first, and perhaps the most unselfish. His grief was unrestrained, for owing to the distasteful embassy to Queen Giovanna on which he had been dispatched he had lost the last months of Catherine's earthly life; nor had he, like Stefano, the consolation of seeing her for a few short days before the end. As soon as possible after the funeral solemnities were over he returned to Siena, and there, according to Catherine's

desire, expressed in her dying message to him, he retired to a hermitage outside the Porta Nuova, where he henceforth gave himself to a life of contemplation and prayer. He never lost sight, however, of his spiritual family, especially of his best friends, Stefano Maconi and Francesco Malavolti. He died in holy poverty in 1406, leaving behind him a name fragrant with sanctity. Of Malavolti and of Barduccio Canigiani we have already spoken. The shock of Catherine's death seems to have weakened the already delicate constitution of the latter. As we have seen, in the absence of Stefano and of Neri, the Saint had leant upon Barduccio, her youngest "son," in a very special manner. His letter describing her last hours—part of which we have quoted—is one of the most beautiful existing documents which relate to St. Catherine.

Stefano fulfilled Catherine's last command by entering the Carthusian Order in 1381, as soon as he had wound up his family affairs. "Never," says Fra Raimondo, "have I known anyone who made speedier progress in holiness, in the Religious Life." Scarcely out of his novitiate he was elected Prior of his convent (Pontignano), an office which he subsequently held for many years in one or other of the *Certose* of Italy. In 1398 he was elected Prior-General of the Carthusians under the Roman Obedience. He was one of those who worked hardest to make the name of Catherine of Siena loved and honoured; collaborating to this end with the Dominican Fathers; translating her works into Latin, and preserving with the greatest devotion every relic of the Saint, which he had collected with great care at the time of her death. He was successful in restoring the whole Carthusian Order to the Roman Obedience, dying after a long, illustrious, and holy life in the glorious Certosa di Pavia, of "Our Lady of Grace of the Carthusians"—a house then in its first splendour and fervour. His devotion to Catherine and her Mission of Peace took one specially beautiful and characteristic form—that of the reconciliation of enemies. Through such reconciliation he had first become known to her: for love of her he now took upon himself her own Christlike mission. At his holy death in 1424 Catherine's name was

upon his lips as he went to rejoin in *Terra Viventium* her who on earth had been his only love. It was Stefano who consoled on his deathbed old Ser Cristofano di Gano Guidini, the Sienese notary who had been so good a friend to Catherine and her family, by speaking to him of the Saint so dear to them both, and of the sweet promise of help that she had made to her sons still in the prison of this life. Cristofano, indeed, had seemed "unable to die" till he had seen Stefano, but he passed away in his friend's arms in an ecstasy of joy and thanksgiving.

Of the Dominican Friars who had been most closely allied with St. Catherine, Fra Raimondo became Master-General of the Roman Obedience in 1380, as she had foretold. To him it was given to carry on the work of reform in the Order dearest to her heart; and in his arduous task he was nobly assisted by Catherine's other friends, one of whom was the future *Beata*, Clara (Thora), daughter of Piero Gambacorti of Pisa. Two other *Beati* were also closely associated with Fra Raimondo—to whom the title of "Blessed" is generally given in the Dominican Order, though he has never been formally beatified. These were B. Lorenzo di Ripafratta and B. Giovanni Dominici. The *Legenda* which Raimondo has left us is the chief source of information as regards St. Catherine's life. His own beautiful and refined personality is evident in every sentence; and his intense simplicity and conscientiousness caused him to take especial care to sift every story he relates, down to the smallest detail. Speaking of the many prodigies which took place after the burial of St. Catherine, her saintly biographer declares, in the following touching passage: "I remember to have heard many miracles of this kind related, but my memory fades with years, and the particular details escape me. I beseech the reader to collect, notwithstanding the lengthened and imperfect form of this work, both flowers and fruits from this holy life." Fra Raimondo was fifteen years in compiling the *Legenda*, which accounts for its discursive and irregular form, and probably also for its lack of accurate chronology. But this can be easily determined from other sources. He died at Nuremberg, in 1399. His body was brought to

Naples, the capital city of his native state; and was buried in the great Dominican church there, which is so full of memories of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Fra Tommaso della Fonte died in 1400, after a long holy, and useful life. He was the first to place a picture of St. Catherine (before her canonization) "in a very conspicuous place" in the church of San Domenico in Siena, to which monastery he remained attached for many years as Prior.

Fra Bartolommeo Domenico rose to high office in the Order; and was one of Fra Raimondo's most active helpers in the scheme of reform for the "neglected and uncultivated garden" for which Catherine had so long and so earnestly prayed. Fra Tommaso Caffarini, another zealous reformer, was perhaps more than any other instrumental in promoting devotion to St. Catherine. He wrote the *Legenda Minor*, a corollary to that of Raimondo (the *Legenda Major*); and later, a *Supplementum*, giving details omitted in the two other works. His name is especially associated with that of the grand Dominican church and Friary of SS. Giovanni e Paolo at Venice, where he laboured long in company with B. Giovanni Dominici; and where he was able to organize effectually a great branch of the Third Order of Penance, which flourishes to-day.¹ It was in this glorious church, the "Westminster Abbey of Venice," the burial-place of the Doges, that the day of St. Catherine's death was first observed as a Festival; all the altars being adorned with flowers in honour of her well-known devotion and love for the "poetry of nature." It was at Venice, too, that the famous *Processus* was held (1411-13), in which the Dominican Order was completely exonerated from the charges brought against it of rendering honour uncanonically to one not yet canonized; and conclusive evidence as to Catherine's fitness to be proposed as an example of holiness was given by all her surviving friends. To this *Processus* we owe the many valuable Depositions as to St. Catherine's life to

¹ The present writer had the great happiness of being clothed with the habit of the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic in this church, on the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, May 24th, 1907; and is inscribed by the Prior in the Congregation of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, of Venice, who are especially recommended to St. Catherine of Siena, and who are "clothed" in the Chapel of Peace.

which reference has so often been made. This *Processus* was the foundation of Catherine's canonization on the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, 1461, by Pope Pius II, Æneas Silvius Piccolomini, himself a Sienese.

St. Catherine's body, placed by the loving care of Fra Raimondo (as she had foretold) in a tomb on the right-hand side of the High Altar of the Minerva—its first resting-place having proved unsuitable, because too much exposed to the weather—was further translated in 1451 by St. Antoninus, while he was Prior of the Minerva before being appointed Archbishop of Florence, to the Rosary Chapel of the same church. It now reposes beneath the High Altar, where it was placed, still incorrupt, after a juridical examination by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1855. Her head forms the chief treasure of the church of San Domenico in Siena, whither it was brought by Fra Raimondo. "On it may still be read the marks of the cruel sufferings which terminated her life."

The occasion on which this precious relic was first venerated in Siena—probably in 1385—was one of solemn rejoicing. A long procession of the clergy and the faithful escorted the head of St. Catherine, which was enclosed in a "magnificent tabernacle of gold," from the Spedale di San Lazzaro, where it had been temporarily placed, to San Domenico. Behind the *baldacchino* which was carried over the casket walked the Mantellate, Catherine's Sisters and friends; so many of whom had valued her so little in her lifetime. Some were there, doubtless, who had, as Fra Raimondo tells us, sought so often to deprive the Saint of Holy Communion; "unenlightened Religious" who had listened to the evil tales of such as Andrea, jealous of the holiness they had never attained. But now all were united, with those who had understood and loved her, in venerating Catherine the Peacemaker, whose gentle deeds and saintly charity they remembered too late.

And among them, her heart overflowing with sorrow and joy and triumph, walked an old woman in the habit of Penance, on whom all eyes were turned; for whom every voice had a loving and reverent greeting. Whose

memories were like hers ? Which of her daughter's friends—Fra Raimondo, who had arranged the Festival, Dom Stefano the Carthusian walking in the procession—which of all of them, even the dearest, had loved Catherine like her own mother ? The child whom she had nursed, who had lain in her arms, whom she had taught to walk, and whom she had so carefully brought up—her child had not been mistaken when, rejecting the earthly ties by which her parents so earnestly desired to bind her, she had chosen Christ as her Spouse. Here and now, if never before, Catherine was finally vindicated in her mother's eyes. All that the poor old woman had so imperfectly understood was made clear. The Church was doing honour to her daughter—the daughter whom everyone now called *Saint*. It was Monna Lapa's greatest hour. The tragedy of Catherine's life was over ; the Triumph had begun ; and soon they would all be reunited—father, mother, children, where there were no more misunderstandings, no more tears, no more pain, so completely should the former things have passed away. It is the last, and the most beautiful of all the pictures—some cheerful, some sad, but all alike instinct with the simple life of home—which we have of St. Catherine of Siena and her mother.

In the little church of Sta Cristina (now Sta Caterina), at Pisa, in which Catherine received the Stigmata, was placed long ago an inscription, which may thus be freely translated :

“ Catherine, Who pierced your hands, Who marked your feet in blood, with the Sign of the Cross ?

Christ, my Beloved, shared with me His Honours, and deigned to adorn me with His Wounds.

The Wounds of Christ are red with Blood : why, Catherine, are yours radiant with light ?

Red with Blood are the Wounds of Christ, for they were made by the Enemy, that our sins might be redeemed ; mine are shining with golden light because they are the Gift of Love.”

"Haec Catharina tuis manibus quis Stigmata fixit?
 Tuis pedibus duræ signa cruenta Crucis?
 Me meus hic Christus proprio signavit honore
 Ornavitque suis quam bene vulneribus.
 Vulnera cum rubeant Christi fœdata cruore.
 Vulnera sic rutilant qui, Catharina, tua?
 Illa rubent merito cedens inflixerat hostis
 Istaque pellucent, aurea pinxit Amor."

Laus Deo.

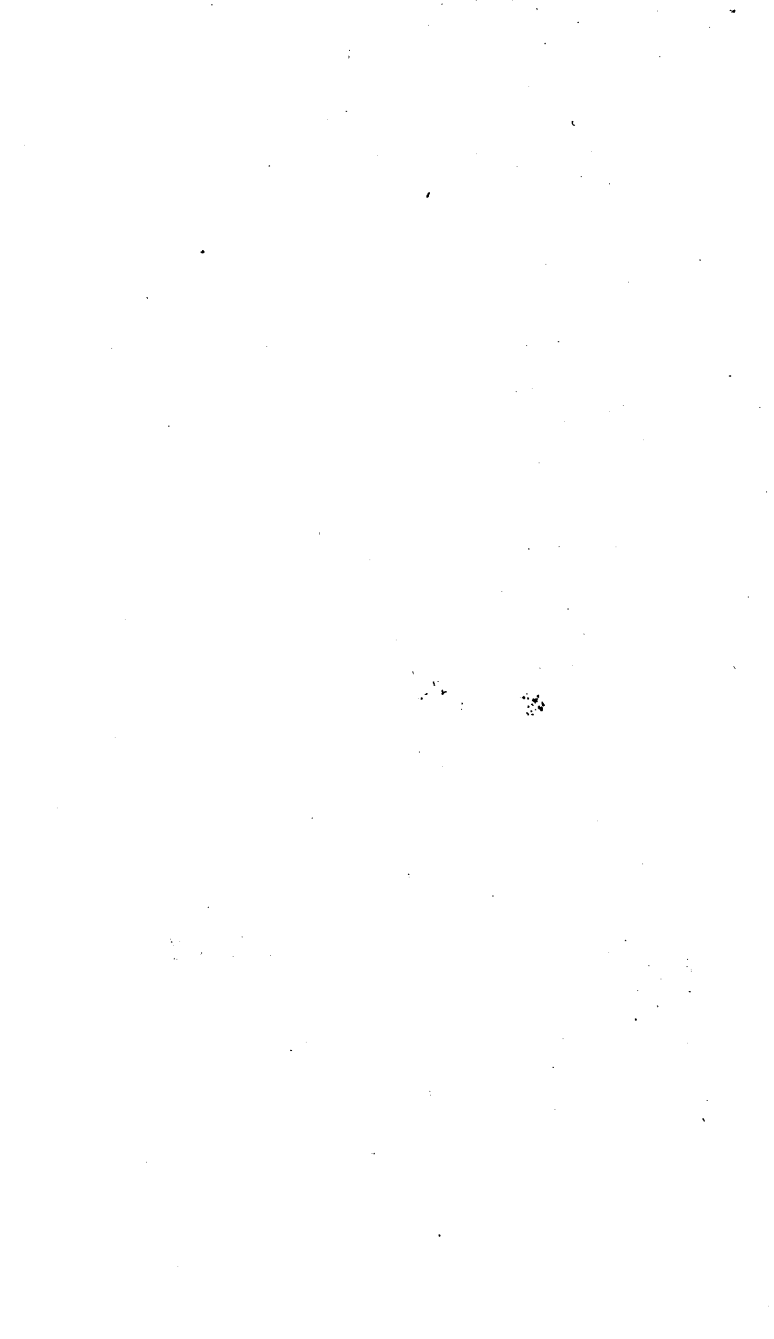


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LISHERS BURNS & OATES

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